

Scotpress



ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES

a Star Trek
fanzine

72

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A ScoTpress publication

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Enterprise - Log Entries 72 is put out by ScoTpress and is available from -

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES 72.

This is the last issue for 1986, so although it seems ridiculously early to start thinking about Christmas, we would like to wish you all a happy time when it comes!

We have been asked if we intend to put out another zine of Jennifer Guttridge's stories; at the moment the answer has to be "No", because, as far as we are aware, Jennifer has no more unpublished material available. She has not written any new STAR TREK material now for several years - instead, she has been writing fantasy stories with a leaning towards swords and sorcery - and although she did say that it might be fun to go back to writing a few Trek stories, so far she hasn't done so. It's just a pity that almost all of her published Trek stories were printed in American zines and - with the exception of the ones that went into New Voyages and Tower of Terror which was reprinted in Archives (ed. Joanna Cantor) - were mostly out of print before British fans found out about American zines.

We've also had a number of people asking us about Variations on a Theme 9. Sheila and I hope to start work on it over the winter, but at the moment we have no idea when it will be finished.

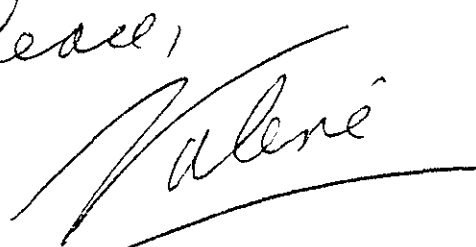
As always, our thanks to all our contributors, past, present - and future. If anyone feels like writing...

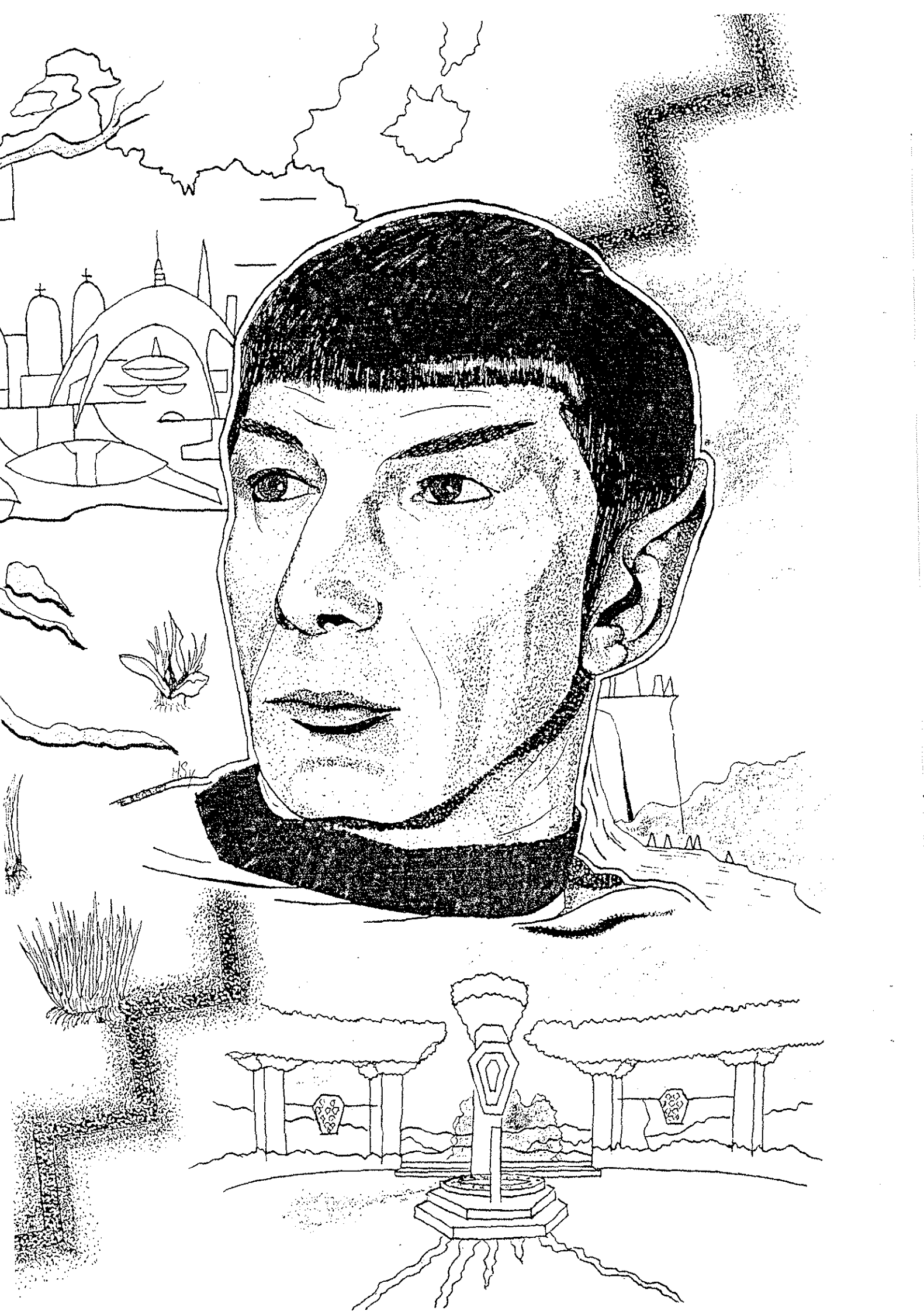
We welcome submissions of fiction, poetry and artwork for ScoTpress zines. We are looking for series-based action-adventure stories, preferably with some character inter-relationship. Alternate universe stories are acceptable, but even these should not be movie-based, K/S, or involve the death of main characters, or be primarily about other ships. These are, after all, "The voyages of the Starship Enterprise..."

Submissions may be sent to either -

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Peace,






DIVISIONS



Vulcan -

Home, land of his father.
 Searing heat, prickling sensations,
 Red sands and brick.
 Ancient customs designed as though torture
 Erected by Surak.
 Various hues of red and pink
 Reflected in dark unfathomable eyes...

Turn around...

Earth -

His mother's realm.
 Cold winds and snow,
 Green fields and blue water.
 Buildings erected ancient and modern
 Crafted by romantic emotional people,
 Infant world of warrior beings,
 Scrutinised by alien eyes...

Turn around...

Which do I choose?

Neither -

I will remain free,
 My own master... except for this Human,
 This commander of my life...
 Because I choose him...
 But even he cannot say
 Which world to embrace -
"Be the best of both."

Julie Thomson



WORD PLAY

by

Elaine Sheard

The briefing room seemed crowded, though in fact there were only six people present. The Andorian negotiator Vellian was angry, and obviously felt no constraint on sharing his anger with the senior officers of the Enterprise.

"Starfleet promised me a competent linguist for these talks, and look what they sent me! She doesn't understand the Altarians, and they only understand her enough to take offence at everything she says."

Lt. Price was not chastened by these remarks, and defended herself with spirit. "I understand the actual words, Negotiator Vellian, but the ritual phrases and quotations should be answered in kind. As their source is unknown to us the universal translator couldn't do any better, even if the Altarians would allow us to use it."

The negotiator's female assistant spoke tentatively. "Perhaps it is merely a ploy. Though the Altarians are xenophobic they need this agreement as much as the Federation does. After all, their economy will collapse if they don't get the ore we are holding back."

Mr. Spock, the Vulcan First Officer, commented, "That would appear logical."

Mr. Vellian's reply contained a note of scepticism. "I don't think logic has a lot to do with it, Commander. If it did they would not have treated any passing Federation citizens so badly we have been forced to ban trade with them until things improve."

At this point Dr. McCoy, silent until now, asked a question. "What are things like down there, anyway? It was the Andorian Minister's son who brought this matter to the Federation's attention, so maybe you can enlighten us."

The Andorian negotiator's temper had improved somewhat as he indulged in his favourite pastime of enlightening other people's ignorance, so he began almost pleasantly, "Any non-Altarian who makes the mistake of landing there has to pay 500 credits for a so-called exit visa. If they cannot produce this sum they must work until they acquire it. Since the wages are low, and the price of food and lodging high, this can be extremely difficult."

Captain Kirk commented dryly, "I can imagine, but the Minister's son somehow managed it."

Mr. Vellian was reticent for once, so it was Spock who answered the Captain's implied question.

"According to my information, after one Altarian year - about ten standard months - the 'guest workers' are permitted to have outside contact. Any that are able to do so can then make private

arrangements to purchase the required visa. I understand that is what happened in Mr. Calgar's case."

Dr. McCoy was intrigued by this and asked, "Just how much did they have to pay, in fact?"

"A good question," Captain Kirk agreed.

They all turned to Mr. Vellian, who looked slightly uncomfortable, but he did answer the question. "Ten tons of Balaxite were sent to secure the repatriation of Mr. Calgar."

Mr. Spock raised an eyebrow as Captain Kirk asked the vital question. "How much is that worth, Spock?"

"At present values, Captain, 10,000 credits - not including transport costs," was the even reply.

"That's some private arrangement!" was the Doctor's comment. "And even that can't be repeated with this embargo in force."

Mr. Vellian was immediately on the defensive. "Since only a few people could afford such a price a more comprehensive system is essential. If an embargo is necessary to achieve this, so be it."

He received support from at least one of the others present. Mr. Spock said, "I entirely concur, sir. Now that the Federation has forbidden both ore and passenger ships to call here, the Altarians will have little option but to release all the Federation citizens in return for favourable ore concessions."

The Doctor was, however, by no means convinced. "That's all very logical, Spock, but if the Altarians can't even bear to talk to us, how are we going to point it out to them?"

And there they were, back where they had started.

No-one spoke for some minutes, but at last Captain Kirk broke the silence. "Perhaps we are looking at this from the wrong angle. The people who must know most about the Altarians are the very people we are trying to help. Surely some of these so-called 'guest workers' must have solved the language problem - after all, their lives probably depend on it. So what are the chances of contacting some of them and using their expertise?"

It was Ms. Terevent, the negotiator's assistant, who answered. "That is an excellent idea, Captain. However, making contact with them could be difficult. The Altarians maintain that it is our responsibility to provide translators, and they refuse to help us further."

Mr. Spock, however, had a suggestion. "Perhaps we could utilise the Altarian invitation to Starfleet personnel to visit their capital city. While they are there they should be able to pick out the non-Altarians. I understand that five feet two inches is the average height of the natives."

He looked towards Captain Kirk, who seemed rather thoughtful, but responded by saying, "I don't want any trouble down there, so I was keeping the crew on board, but if that's the only way to solve this problem, then I suppose I shall have to think again."

Mr. Spock was giving instructions to the teams who were going down to the planet to search for a linguist among the Federation citizens trapped there. "One of each pair must be a member of Security, and all must be in uniform. The Altarians only suggested our taking leave there because they badly need Federation credits. If purchases are made you will pay the price asked without question, and if applicable a gratuity of not less than 10%, which is the local norm. The Altarians are not aware of the real reason for our presence, so even if you come across a likely candidate you must report back before any but the most superficial contact is made."

Mr. Sulu, on hearing the first part of Mr. Spock's instructions, slowly made his way towards Lt. Janet Roland from Security, who was his preferred partner for the trip. She was blonde, compact, and someone he had been trying to get to know for weeks.

When the First Officer had finished speaking she accepted Sulu's suggestion that they go to the planet together with gratifying promptness. As they made their way towards the transporter room they reached an understanding.

Once on the planet's surface they set out briskly, leaving the others behind. It was a dull grey city, with low squat buildings and narrow streets. The day was cold and overcast, an all-too-usual day for this uninteresting planet on the edge of nowhere. The two young people did not let this spoil their mood, however. They talked happily as they walked through the muddy thoroughfares. The only apparent places of entertainment were some rather seedy looking taverns; after walking for about half an hour they came across one of these establishments which had at least a little more character.

Mr. Sulu turned to his companion and asked, "Shall we give this place a try?"

"Sure, why not, though I hear the drinks are pretty lethal wherever you go."

So they entered the tavern. It was dark and shabby, but at least it appeared to be fairly clean. The occupants, about ten of them, stopped what they were doing and stared at the two officers in some surprise, not unmixed with hostility. As the two young people made their way to a table and sat down, however, they resumed what they were doing, merely muttering to themselves as they did so.

Some minutes passed. Mr. Sulu, looking pointedly at the man behind the bar, who was probably the owner, attempted to attract his attention. Nothing happened. He then asked Lt. Roland, "Do you think I should go up to the bar and try Intergalactic?"

The reply was firm. "I wouldn't recommend it. I think we'll just have to be patient."

After about five minutes the barman opened the door at the back of the bar and called out loudly in that unintelligible language that was giving all the trouble. A figure appeared silhouetted against the light of what, from the smell, was the kitchen.

The figure was far taller than any Altarian. When it came nearer the two Starfleet officers could see a vulcanoid male, but it remained a mystery whether he was Vulcan, Romulan or some other

allied race. As he came from behind the bar and walked towards their table one of the other customers addressed him, putting his hand on the taller man's shoulder as he did so.

Both the Federation officers watched with interest. What would the reaction be? Would he respond like a Vulcan and draw away with distaste, or like a Romulan, with violence? In the event he did neither, but allowed the touch, his face unchanged. Yet a certain stiffness in his posture intrigued Mr. Sulu, who studied him carefully when at last the man approached their table.

He addressed them in accentless Intergalactic, saying evenly, "Good day. Can I be of assistance?"

Mr. Sulu was somewhat flustered by this but replied after a pause, "Er, yes, we would like a drink. Could you perhaps recommend something?"

Lt. Roland listened while the local beer was discussed, but soon lost patience with this and came straight to the point, asking, "You are certainly not one of the native population. Are you by any chance a Federation citizen?"

Though she favoured the direct approach even she held her breath as the brown eyes turned towards her. The reply, however, was quite courteous.

"Yes, Lieutenant, I am a Federation citizen, a native of the planet Vulcan."

Lt. Roland was apologetic on hearing this. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be nosey. I just didn't expect to meet a Vulcan here."

The reply was expressionless. "We are a well-travelled race, and are present on many non-Vulcan and non-Federation planets."

Mr. Sulu decided to join in. If they were in for a Vulcan put-down he wanted to get as many facts as possible first. "You seem to speak the local language well. I've heard it's not an easy one."

"The language itself is not difficult, though the vernacular can present problems. Now if you have made your decision on your choice of refreshments...?"

At this the order was quickly given, and the Vulcan returned to the bar. Mr. Sulu turned and whispered to Lt. Roland, "Talk about fools rushing in!"

The reply was firm. "Oh come on, we got the information we needed, that's what counts. Anyway, let's see how you deal with tipping a Vulcan."

Indeed, Sulu had a problem, as one of the many things he had learned about alien customs at the Academy was that Vulcans didn't approve of tipping. On Vulcan it was considered an insult.

The Vulcan returned, and putting the drinks on the table said, "The wine costs 2 credits, and the beer 1.50."

Mr. Sulu proffered a 5 credit note, saying nothing.

"You were wanting change?" The tone was non-committal.

"Not if it's not customary."

"Very wise." With that the Vulcan took the note and made to leave.

Mr. Sulu spoke quickly. "Tell me, do you work here regularly? It's nice to know of someone who can speak both Intergalactic and the local language."

"I am here every day from noon until 10 p.m., local time. I trust your drinks are satisfactory?"

"Yes, thank you."

The Vulcan merely nodded and walked away.

Mr. Spock was in the briefing room listening to a negative report from yet another pair of Enterprise personnel. When it was finished he said, "Very well, gentlemen. Dismissed."

Lt. Price, who was there in the hope that her linguistic skills might have been needed, sighed. Mr. Spock looked at her.

"Sorry, sir, but we don't seem to be having much success, do we?"

"Not at the moment, Lieutenant. However, we shall resume tomorrow. As your services are not needed for the moment you may go."

"Yes, sir. I think I'll just take a look at those language tapes."

Mr. Spock watched her go, not without sympathy. He had just begun his report for the Captain when Mr. Sulu and Lt. Roland entered. The First Officer listened in silence to their rather embarrassed story, then after sending them to produce individual reports of a more coherent nature he went to consult Captain Kirk.

So it was that next day a party consisting of Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Lt. Sulu and Lt. Price walked through the unprepossessing streets of Altariae. At last they reached the tavern where the bilingual Vulcan had been discovered. Things were much as before, one Starfleet uniform obviously meaning as little as another to the local citizens. Even Spock's Vulcan face was only of passing interest.

The Enterprise party sat at a vacant table and this time the owner needed no prompting to call his Vulcan assistant. Starfleet rankings clearly held no mystery for this individual as he looked not at his Vulcan compatriot but at Captain Kirk, asking calmly, "Can I be of any help, Captain?"

"We would like something palatable to drink, if that is possible."

"Of course, sir. May I suggest beer, or perhaps certain wines?"

A discussion ensued about the quality of each, and some were

recommended as quite drinkable. As their attentive waiter left the Captain turned to Lt. Price and asked,

"Well, Lieutenant, what do you think of our possible linguist?"

"His Intergalactic is accentless, and he seems to have a good vocabulary, so he should make an adequate translator."

Doctor McCoy grinned at this, but it was Mr. Spock who commented, "All Vulcans should have this ability given the circumstances, though he does appear to have acquired some non-Vulcan habits in his travels."

The Doctor had to protest. "If you mean he was almost pleasant, all I can say is that it makes a nice change. He could have a problem, however. This planet is poor in R4, a substance essential to Vulcans. If he's been here any length of time this deficiency could prove fatal."

Captain Kirk asked, "How long would it be before that stage was reached?"

"About twelve to eighteen months, it's impossible to be more precise. I can give him supplements, if he isn't already taking them, but that's only a stop-gap."

"Well, he's had time to learn the language, so it looks like our arrival might have come at just the right time for him."

When they had been served and the drinks had been paid for, a 10% tip being given and received without comment, Captain Kirk issued an invitation. "Would you take a drink with us, as I have a proposition to put to you."

"I shall be free in 30 minutes, Captain. I shall join you then."

"Very well, Mr... Er, I'm sorry, I don't know your name."

"Savil, Captain, is quite sufficient."

"Of course, Savil, but let me introduce my colleagues."

Savil acknowledged the introductions and then returned to the bar.

Time passed, then the outside door opened and two people entered, obviously non-Altarians by their height. The man had flowing red hair, the woman was dark and pale. After looking round for a moment they made their way to a table at the back of the room. They were in conversation with Savil, who seemed to know them. Food and drink were brought, and then Savil, after filling a glass at this table, came to join Captain Kirk and his party.

The Captain asked him to sit down and he did so without comment. As Kirk told Savil about their mission, and about their language problem, he studied him. He was tall and thin, with the pointed ears and dark eyes of most Vulcans. Though his face was expressionless it did not have the harshness sometimes associated with his race. His age was hard to judge; he was certainly an adult, but Spock could probably make a more accurate assessment. When he had finished, Kirk waited for his response.

Savil said firmly, "I am unable to help you, Captain."

Before Captain Kirk could comment Spock spoke in his most crushing manner. "A Federation Starfleet Captain has asked you to help him in the execution of his duty. As a Federation citizen that must surely take precedence over any other consideration."

Savil addressed Captain Kirk, saying calmly, "I was under the impression that it was a request, not an order, Captain. Perhaps I was mistaken?"

"No, Savil you were not. I had hoped that a request would be all that was necessary."

"Normally yes, but as you see my time is not my own."

"Your work here is of such importance?"

"The work itself, hardly, but I have agreed to undertake it. You would not have me go back on such an agreement?"

"Of course not, though perhaps in your off-duty time you would be willing to pass your knowledge to our computer?"

"That is all that is required?"

Spock answered this at his most officious. "We have already arranged a computer link with the house given over to the Federation delegation. If Savil is at all familiar with a computer terminal, it should not take long to complete the task."

"I have the necessary knowledge and expertise. Three sessions of ten standard hours should provide enough time to finish the work."

Captain Kirk spoke with relief. "Good, that seems to be settled then."

Savil's reply was bland. "There is one thing, Captain. If I am to be employed by Starfleet, is there not the matter of payment?"

Before Captain Kirk could answer Spock said, his voice cold, "It ill becomes a Vulcan to speak of payment. To have been of assistance should be payment enough."

The reply was equally cold. "I need no help in deciding what is the correct way to behave, Commander. This is, I think, between Captain Kirk and myself."

Mr. Spock said nothing, but made to rise. Captain Kirk stopped him.

"Sit down, Spock," he said, his voice firm. "Now, Savil, how much would you consider fair payment?"

"Three thousand credits, Captain," was the calm reply.

Mr. Spock drew breath at that, but his Captain held up his hand to forestall comment, then said mildly, "That seems rather excessive, Savil."

"If you consider it so I am open to a counter offer."

"No, I am willing to accept your own valuation of your

contribution. However, the money will only be paid when both Lt. Price and Mr. Spock consider your work complete. Agreed?"

"Agreed, Captain. I shall present myself at the delegation's house at midnight standard time, if that is acceptable."

"That will be fine - it should give us time to get organised. Mr. Spock will be expecting you, won't you, Spock?"

"If those are your orders, sir," was the reply.

With that Savil rose from the table and went to join his friends. After he had gone Spock was the first to speak.

"I must protest, Captain."

"Don't, Spock. We need him. Talking about money may be bad taste to some Vulcans, but there's nothing wrong in knowing your worth."

Dr. McCoy spoke almost admiringly. "He had us over a barrel, Jim, and he knew it. Anyway, if it was a choice between putting all this on an economic basis and starving, surely his was the more logical approach, Spock?"

"Since he appears to be the cook in this establishment, your remarks have no validity, Doctor," was the acid reply.

Captain Kirk had had enough, and said firmly, "The subject is closed, gentlemen. The arrangements have been made, and I for one feel sure that Savil will honour them."

The house given over to the Federation delegation was somewhat shabby. In one of the upstairs rooms, however, the furniture had been stacked against a wall and a computer terminal installed in the resulting space.

Savil was sitting alone at this terminal when McCoy entered carrying a covered tray. The Doctor set the tray down and asked cheerfully, "All alone? Spock not here keeping an eye on his fancy equipment?"

"Not at the moment, Doctor. I understand that Lieutenant Price is monitoring my input, but your First Officer is at the moment answering the query of a colleague."

"Good, then this is an excellent time for a meal break. I don't suppose you've had much Vulcan food lately, so how about sampling what our autochef can do?"

"Meal breaks were not part of the agreement, Doctor."

"The Federation must have lots of rules about employees, right? I'm sure time to eat is one of them."

"I will not refuse then, Doctor, if you will agree to join me."

"I hoped you'd say that, so I brought my supper with me."

"Starfleet runs to standard time, Doctor; isn't this the middle of the night for you?"

"Doctors work odd hours sometimes. Anyway, you can't be getting much sleep yourself in the next few days."

"Vulcans can function on very little sleep if necessary, Doctor."

"So Spock keeps telling me, but you need to be in good health for that. You can't tell me you aren't suffering from R4 deficiency. You must be if you've been here any length of time. How long is it since you left Vulcan? A purely medical question, of course."

Savil replied guardedly, "It is not necessary to live on one's home planet to receive an adequate diet, Doctor. It is more than ten years since I left."

"That's a long time for anyone to be away from home, especially a Vulcan, if you don't mind me saying so."

The other man's eyes were hooded as he answered, "Fortunately, Doctor, it is not only Humans who can be hospitable. Vulcans too can be most courteous to a compatriot. As to your curiosity, Humans are well known for their personal questions, something just acceptable in a Doctor."

"That's all right then! So come on, eat up."

Both men ate their supper with good appetite, and were just finishing when Spock came in.

Dr. McCoy was immediately on the defensive, saying quickly, "Even Vulcans are entitled to a meal break, Spock."

"No doubt, Doctor, but it was surely not necessary for you to provide the refreshments."

"You're hardly going to get Vulcan food on Altar, so I thought I'd give Savil some home cooking."

"Not from the autochef, I fancy," was the cool reply.

Savil was more understanding. "It was quite palatable, Doctor; I was honoured to share your meal."

The Doctor answered with a quick, "Well, I hope you like what's coming next." Before anyone could comment he whipped out his medical scanner and ran it over Savil.

It was Spock, however, who expressed outrage. "Really, Doctor, if you consider it your duty to examine Savil you could at least inform us both of your intention. Have you no respect for another's privacy?"

"Not if this is the only way to get co-operation I haven't. Now that we've got this far, Savil, how about letting me finish the job?"

"If you insist, Doctor. I had no idea you felt so strongly on the matter."

Spock also conceded. "If you consider this necessary, Doctor, I will give you 30 minutes, though it must be understood that Savil's task may require an extra session to complete if these interruptions continue."

The Doctor sounded only faintly apologetic as he said, "I'm sorry about this, Savil, but it is for your own good."

"Since my evenings are free, Doctor, it is of no moment. I bow to your authority."

"First time I've heard that from a Vulcan," the Doctor was heard to mutter as he watched Spock leave.

The examination was brief but thorough, then the Doctor said, "It's unfortunate that you aren't allowed up to the ship. As far as I can tell you are in reasonable health, apart from the R4 deficiency. Even with the supplements I can give you, unless your diet improves you'll be in real trouble in no more than three months time."

"Ample time for the Enterprise to conclude her mission here, Doctor."

"Maybe, but a lot can go wrong in these diplomatic situations. It's a shame the embargo was imposed before you'd been here the ten standard months required before you could appeal to your family for help."

"It was, Doctor."

"Still, as soon as the embargo is lifted they'll be rallying round, I'm sure. One thing about Vulcans, they take their family responsibilities seriously."

"I made no such appeal, Doctor, nor do I intend to do so."

"Then you're more of a fool than I took you for! Surely you insult them by not giving them the chance to help you?"

"I appreciate your medical concern, Doctor, but anything else is really a personal matter."

"Very well, but I just hope Negotiator Vellian is successful or your Vulcan stubbornness will be the death of you!" With that the Doctor picked up the tray and left.

It was three days later that Lt. Price went looking for the Doctor. She found him working on some papers in his office.

"Oh Doctor, there you are. I've got some good news for you."

The Doctor liked the linguist, and said with a smile, "Well, you'd better sit down. Lieutenant, and tell me about it."

She sat across from the Doctor and began eagerly, "Since we got the revised tapes things have been going a lot better with the negotiations, though there are still some problems. Well, today it was agreed that the Altarians get an interim load of metals; in return the people with outstanding visas can come aboard the Enterprise and leave when we do. That's not all - they're going to allow you to visit the house set aside for sick aliens, and ten of the worst cases get visas too!"

"That's a start at least. When do we get to make this visit, and who decides which are the most deserving cases, anyway?"

"You get to decide everything. You should have heard Mr. Uellian sing your praises - I didn't think he had it in him..." Lt. Price looked contrite and went on, "Oh sorry, forget I said that, please, Doctor."

"Of course, Carol. I don't like him much either, but he does seem to know his job. I'll go and have a word with him right now."

"He's in Briefing Room 2, but he asked that you go and see him in half an hour."

"That's big of him. But don't worry - I'll be there."

It was in the early hours of the next day that Dr. McCoy once again brought his supper to share with Savil at his computer terminal. He was received quite courteously.

"Good morning, Doctor. I did not expect to share a meal with you again, especially after your rather full day."

"You heard about that, did you?"

"Indeed, Doctor. A most encouraging development."

"You could say that, though not from a doctor's point of view. No-one is actually dying down here, but the medical facilities are almost non-existent."

"I know, Doctor. It is as well that most of the non-Altarians are young and healthy when they arrive here."

"Will your work for us be finished tonight, Savil?"

"Yes, Doctor. Both your First Officer and your linguist have acknowledged that I have fulfilled the agreement."

"Good. I suppose you'll be trying to buy a visa with the money we are paying you. It's a shame you didn't have it before this interim agreement."

"The sale of visas has been suspended for some weeks, Doctor."

"You can't tell me there aren't any under-the-counter dealings going on, Savil, because I know better."

"You are suggesting that I would have anything to do with such dealings, Doctor?"

"I'm suggesting nothing, but I know you wouldn't have asked for that money without a good reason." The other man was silent and the Doctor went on in a firm voice, "I've something I want you to have. Before you get on your Vulcan high horse, I must tell you that in my medical opinion you are the one most in need." With that he handed Savil the last of the ten visas the Altarians had allowed him.

The reply was non-committal. "This appears to be a blank visa, Doctor."

"Yes, and I want you to fill it in with your no doubt unpronounceable name and bring it here with your passport as soon as you can."

"You consider that I can make the best use of this, Doctor?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well, Doctor, I accept it with much appreciation."

The Doctor was delighted, and said with a grin, "Well, what do you know - a Vulcan with some common sense!"

Two days later the talks were again at a standstill. The Altarians were asking for more impossible concessions.

Dr. McCoy for one was not surprised. Things had been going just too well, he commented gloomily. He was on his way to the transporter room, where the last of the visa holders was being brought aboard. Though he recognised one of them, it was not the person he was expecting.

"Where's Savil?" he asked the dark, pale girl from the tavern.

"Are you Doctor McCoy?" she asked with a smile.

"I am indeed," was the grim reply.

"Oh good, Savil sent a message for you to say that he was sure you would agree that he had made the best possible use of the visa you gave him."

For once the Doctor was speechless. The girl went on artlessly, "I'm especially grateful as when we agreed to help each other I didn't know I'd become pregnant, and it *did* make things rather difficult."

"I can imagine," the Doctor said faintly.

The girl went on happily, "Of course, you solved the problem. The thought of having a baby down there was rather frightening."

The Doctor could only be reassuring. "It must have been, but you'll be all right now. Nurse Chapel here will take care of you, and I'll come and see you later."

Dr. McCoy was angry, but the person who had engendered his anger was unavailable, so he went to find a substitute. Mr. Spock listened to the Doctor's complaint about Savil with interest but little sympathy, then said calmly,

"Savil did not in fact say he would use the visa himself, only that he would put it to good use - which he did."

The Doctor was not impressed. "Maybe, but it wasn't what I intended, and he knew it. He had no right to give it to his girlfriend!"

"Surely a woman having a child in such primitive conditions puts two lives at risk? Savil's logic is irreproachable."

"I suppose so, especially if the child is half Vulcan."

"That is out of the question, Doctor."

"Oh yes, and who says so?"

"I do, Doctor. Any reluctance in appealing to his family would have been overcome if there had been the remotest possibility of that."

"You think so?"

"I know so. Care for a Vulcan child and its mother would have been paramount, whatever the personal inconvenience."

"I thought you didn't approve of Savil."

"Because I regard some of his actions as being worthy of censure does not mean that I think he would act other than responsibly in such a matter," Spock finished firmly.

Mr. Spock proved correct in that, as when Dr. McCoy talked to Rita, the pregnant girl, he found that the red-haired man from the tavern was her husband.

Nearly a week passed, and the talks continued. A final agreement had still not been reached, though more concessions were made on both sides. It was one of these concessions that once again took Dr. McCoy to see Mr. Spock.

The results of this visit had a rather unenthusiastic Vulcan contacting the Record Department of his home planet.

The department head, making careful enquiries, asked Spock, "Your Medical Officer requests we make the records of a Vulcan national available to you without this individual's knowledge?"

"That is correct. The details may enable us to fit Savil into one of the categories now receiving visas from the Altarians, and therefore prevent a medical emergency."

"What are those categories, Spock?"

"Anyone who is required on his or her home planet for legal or diplomatic reasons."

"You think Savil will fit into one of these?"

"There is that possibility."

"I concur. Very well, I will authorise the release of this information. I must warn you, however, that though I take responsibility for this, any charge of misuse of this information will fall on you."

"I understand and accept."

"Very well. Do you have the family name, or any other details?"

"No, nothing, apart from the given name. I do have, however, a sample of Savil's fingerprints."

"Taken with his knowledge?"

"No, acquired by chance."

"That could lead to legal charges for both of us if Savil should choose to make them."

"I am aware of that."

"Acknowledged. I accept your reason for requesting this information. After receipt of the fingerprints the records will be sent by Vulcan Code 3 at 1600 hours standard time. Vulcan out."

Captain Kirk looked at his First Officer and Chief Medical Officer in some surprise, saying, "I think you're both exceeding your authority in this matter, but we'll leave that for the moment. What have you found out that you think will help Savil then, Spock?"

"Since a Vulcan living off-world should report to his embassy every Vulcan year, he is technically in violation of this duty. Normally external circumstances would be taken into consideration. However, there is also an outstanding summons from the Vulcan Law Society on a civil matter. Until he answers this summons he can be said to be in breach of the law."

Dr. McCoy rather liked this and asked, "You mean there's a warrant out for his arrest?"

"Essentially, yes."

Captain Kirk was more cautious. "I don't like the idea of arresting a Vulcan, especially on what could well be just a technicality."

Dr. McCoy was suddenly very serious and said gravely, "Never mind Vulcan pride. A man's life is in danger. Three months was only an informed estimate - it may already be too late."

Captain Kirk reached a decision and said firmly, "Right, we can tell the Altarians he is wanted for legal reasons, and indeed he is. That being the case, this must be done properly. You two can go with them if you like, but Security must be in charge, and the legal procedures must be followed."

So it was that Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy Security Chief Shaw and two Altarian law officers were walking the streets of Altaria. They had been given Savil's address by the suddenly helpful authorities. They were directed to a room at the back of a shabby house by the less than helpful owner.

Spock knocked on the door and it was opened by the tall red haired man now known to be Rita's husband. When he saw who it was he looked worried and asked,

"There's nothing wrong with my wife, is there?"

Dr. McCoy was reassuring. "No, David, she's very well, and so is the baby. In fact, I have a letter for you." With that he handed over an envelope.

Spock raised an eyebrow but only said, "We are looking for Savil. Perhaps you could help us."

David, just on the point of opening his letter, said quickly, "Yes, come in. Savil has gone to the market and should be back any

time."

They all entered a large poorly furnished room and waited uneasily. David read the letter and then turned to the Doctor with a beaming smile.

"They're both just fine, and it's going to be a boy."

"I know," the Doctor said with an answering smile. "So you can stop worrying about them - we'll take care of them."

"I'm sure you will. Savil said you are a good doctor and a good man."

"Did he indeed," was the dry reply.

Five minutes passed while David re-read his letter and the others waited. Then footsteps could be heard outside. Savil entered carrying a basket full of parcels. He examined the full room without expression.

David rushed up to him saying excitedly, "Savil, the doctor brought a letter from Rita, and she's going to be fine, and the baby, and it's going to be a boy!"

Savil answered calmly, "That is good news, David, but aren't there rather a lot of people here just to deliver one letter?"

For the first time David seemed to see just how many people there were in the room. Spock came straight to the point.

"We are here on the authority of the Vulcan Law Society, to detain you for failing to comply with an order to report to them."

Savil, both face and tone bland, asked, "You are going to arrest me, Commander?"

The use of military rank wasn't lost on the Doctor, who said pointedly, "The Altarian authorities have graciously agreed that any alien wanted for legal reasons on his or her home world may be extradited."

Savil's face didn't change, but his voice had a slight edge to it as he asked, "Then they are going to arrest me on your behalf? As he said this he walked over to the Altarian law officers.

To the embarrassment of the Enterprise crew the Altarians immediately took hold of his arms and slapped handcuffs on him.

David hadn't been following all the conversation, but he understood that and said angrily, "Hey, wait a minute! What do you think you're doing?"

Dr. McCoy took him by the shoulder and led him to the other side of the room, talking to him quietly.

Security Chief Shaw knew better than to protest and said, "Thank you, gentlemen. If you'll give me the key I'll return it when I get the prisoner onto the ship."

The reply was quite friendly. "Of course, Commander. We know you can't be too careful with these aliens," the fellow feeling between two law officers making him forget that Shaw was also an

alien.

David came over to Savil and said, "The Doctor has told me how it is with you, so I suppose this is goodbye for the moment. I know you don't like to be thanked, but you've been a good friend to both Rita and me. We'll never forget you, and if you wouldn't mind, when our son is born we'd like to name him after you."

Savil's lips twitched as he answered, "You do me a great honour, David, though it would perhaps be more appropriate as a second name."

"You could be right. Well, that's settled then!" He looked at Savil with a mischievous smile and concluded, "I'll pack your things, as you seem to be somewhat tied up at the moment."

The Doctor groaned at this and said, "I'll give you a hand. Anyone with a sense of humour that bad could well need help."

The small party reached the Enterprise without further incident, the two Altarian law officers having said goodbye to Mr. Shaw with something like regret.

Once they stepped off the transporter pad Shaw unlocked the handcuffs and after a nod from the Captain left without a word.

Savil turned to the others and said evenly, "Well, you seem to have got me aboard after all. I recognise the validity of the order of the Law Society, but trust you have over-reacted for medical reasons."

Spock's reply was firm. "You are in breach of the law, Savil, though I am informed that the legal sanctions will be lifted as soon as you comply with the order."

Dr. McCoy wasn't so conciliatory and said, "There is, however, the matter of the misuse of the visa. Admit you knew it was meant for you and nobody else."

"I did, Doctor, and knowing it arranged for it to be used by another."

The Doctor was somewhat taken aback by this unequivocal statement, and went on more reasonably. "I'll say no more about it, and I hope you'll be as obliging in the matter of the fingerprints."

Savil was puzzled and asked, "Fingerprints? I know nothing of fingerprints."

"I got them from my medical equipment. Spock used them for identification so he could get your records from Vulcan."

Savil seemed intrigued by this. "The Record Department agreed to this, Spock? You must indeed have a way with words."

Spock seemed to think it necessary to say unequivocally, "I take full responsibility for my actions."

The Doctor wasn't having this. "Oh come on, it was at my request. If anyone should take the responsibility it's me."

Savil held up his hand. "Enough, gentlemen. As far as I am

concerned the matter of the records, as of the visa, need not be referred to again."

The Doctor sighed happily. "Good. If that's so, Savil, you can come to Sickbay, where I've got a nice bed waiting for you."

"I shall be at your disposal as soon as I have dealt with this legal problem."

"All right," the Doctor conceded, "I suppose you'll be more relaxed with that behind you."

Spock too was helpful. "I have arranged a communications link with Vulcan. You can make use of the terminal in my cabin, if you are agreeable."

"That is most courteous, Spock."

It was two weeks later that Dr. McCoy made his way to the passenger cabins to talk to Savil.

"Well, thank goodness that's over! I hate these formal receptions, but I suppose this one was in a good cause."

"The agreement has been successfully concluded, Doctor?"

"Yes, though I don't know who's kidding who. The Altarians get a guaranteed ore supply and industrial investment, the Federation gets the release of the alien workers and a base on one of the Altarian moons."

"Something for everyone, in fact."

"Yes, but the workers are only being allowed to leave ten a week, and the Altarians are to get an ore shipment a week."

"Both are being cautious, but in time they could well learn to trust one another."

"Perhaps, but at least we won't have to wait so long. We can leave as soon as the next shipment arrives, in about a weeks time."

"You are pleased to be leaving, Doctor?"

"I certainly am! So are you, I should think."

"Yes, Doctor. Although Altar is not without interest it is not a place to spend any length of time."

"For the next few years you'll have to live on Vulcan, or at least a Vulcan colony. Only real Vulcan food will take care of your long-term bone marrow problem."

"Your Dr. M'Benga has made that very clear. As it happens I must return to Vulcan to sort out my cousin's estate."

"Left you some problems, has he?"

"The estate is entailed and has not received the investment it needed, and as the Law Society found it necessary to point out, there are some tax anomalies. However, my betrothed has a degree in

agriculture. I am sure her father will consider putting her income into the estate as a good investment."

"You are betrothed?"

"Of course, as are all Vulcans of my age. We shall marry in two years time."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to be personal. I just thought that your reluctance to contact your family meant that you had disassociated yourself from their way of life."

"Not at all. I honour them for allowing me to chose my own path between coming of age and marriage."

"They didn't want you to become a painter?"

"I have a natural ability as an engineer, and excellent qualifications. My family considered I should make use of them, but I considered painting of equal interest."

"Engineering bores you, does it?"

"Hardly, though I found visiting other worlds and studying their art more stimulating and informative."

"So much so that you took considerable risks with your health not to have cut this time short. That's hardly flattering to your future wife, is it?"

"We are bonded. Flattery is not relevant. She knows and accepts me as I am."

"She sounds like a sensible woman."

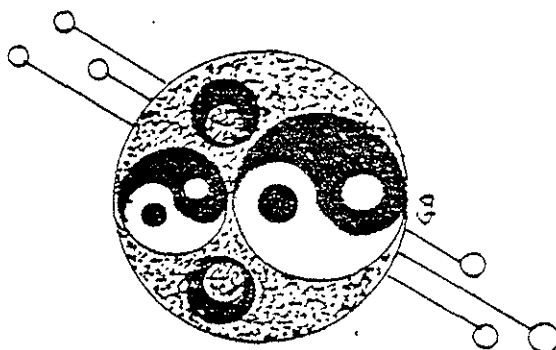
"She is. I have taken you into my confidence to assure you that your concern for me is no longer necessary."

"I'm glad to hear it. You Vulcans are so stubborn you're not easy to help."

"Compared to Humans we are models of reasonableness, Doctor."

"Something for which you should be grateful, Savil."

"You could well be right, Doctor."



sharing



So many times we've been like this,
So much pain... so much death... so much care.
Still he holds on and each time I wonder
How much more he can take, and endure.

He opens himself so rarely,
But when he does it's with no holds barred.
Yet this last hurt is so much worse than before,
For this time it was his child who died.

He stirs... a low moan... a shudder,
My hand gently touches his hair.
If there was only some way I could help him,
or at least let him know I was there.

Please, Jim, oh, please don't do this,
Let go... there's no-one to see.
I know I often deny emotion,
But I mean it only for me.

A Human needs a vent for his feelings,
A Human needs truly to cry,
And you are undeniably Human,
Please don't try to be brave and deny.

I sit on the bed and reach out,
Gathering him close to my chest,
Not knowing that this was the position
That Miramane and he had loved best.

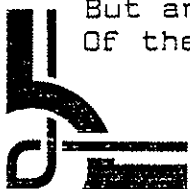
His anguish bursts forth like a floodgate,
I recoil from the strength of his grief.
But I am the only one with him,
The only one who can offer relief.

His shaking body gradually quiets,
The iron of his grip is relaxed,
His hazel eyes, red-rimmed and swollen,
Seek mine... and in sharing... grief's passed.

A small smile, exhausted, yet grateful,
He starts to move out of my arms,
I tighten my hold for a moment
As though trying to protect him from harm.

A fleeting resistance, then yielding,
A deep, rather tremulous sigh,
Then, "Thank you, my friend, for caring,
And preventing me from living a lie."

He is peaceful now, my young Captain,
Though his face is still drawn and wet.
But an icy fear is travelling through me
Of the horrors that will come to him yet.



Obada Challenge



by

Jan Davis



(For Susan and Jane)

The Enterprise had just gone into a safe orbit around the planet Obada. They were there as a representative ship from Starfleet.

"Sir," Mr. Chekov called, alarmed, "there is a Klingon ship in orbit as well."

"Thank you. Helm, tactical manoeuvres - keep the planet between us and the Klingon ship. Remember, we are here on a peace mission."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, care to join me?" Kirk asked, turning to the two men standing behind his chair. "Mr. Scott, you have control."

"Aye, sir," Mr. Scott answered.

The three men entered the transporter room to find Tricia Yen waiting for them.

"Captain, may I accompany you?" she asked.

"Permission granted, Rider Yen." Kirk glanced around the room. "Where's Enterprise Too?"

"Being spoilt by Nurse Chapel," Tricia laughed.

Kirk nodded, and the party stepped onto the transporter pads. "Ready, Lieutenant. You may energise," Kirk told the engineer on duty.

"Yes, sir." The man operated the controls and the group disappeared in a shimmer of light.

They materialised outside a village in a patch that had been cleared of the rocks and small bushes that littered the landscape. A group of men approached them from the village, with a party of Klingons accompanying them.

"Greetings, Captain." The leader picked Kirk out. "I am Borack, Chief Elder of the Obada people. Allow me to introduce Captain Varon of the Klingon Empire. I know that your two races have been from time to time at war with each other, but for now, while you are both my guests, please be friends."

"I am Captain Kirk. My First Officer, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, and

Rider Yen." Kirk introduced his party with a casual hand. "We were informed that your people wanted to unite with our Federation."

"Did we? I think not. We are interested in joining with one of your empires, but as to which one, we are still undecided. Therefore, to help us make the final decision, we have devised a challenge to test the character and skills of the person chosen to undertake it."

"Borack, what form is this challenge to take, so that I can choose my most suitable crew member?" Kirk asked.

"I agree with Captain Kirk for once. I too wish to choose the correct crew member," Captain Varon echoed.

"Very well. Whoever you choose will have to tame and ride an Eglant." Borack indicated a corral containing a number of quadrupeds that had the look of a crossbreed of a horse and an elephant. They had smooth coats of an electric blue. "A trail has been set with a number of clues and tests along the way. The ultimate test is to find a holy relic, the sacred pendant of Eric, which has been hidden somewhere in the mountains that surround our five main villages. Be warned - the winner may not be the person who returns with the pendant. We have judges placed along the course, and they will be looking out for other qualities as well. Once the test is over we will be able to decide who becomes our allies."

Kirk turned to Tricia Yen. "Well, Rider, I think I can safely leave this task in your hands."

Yen smiled as she answered, "Yes, sir."

Borack observed this exchange with interest.

Captain Varon thought to himself, *A mere woman! What good is a mere woman for a job like this? Tol is best at dealing with both women and animals.*

"Captain Varon, your choice, please?" Borack asked.

"Tol, you are my choice." Captain Varon's smile would have cut ice.

"Yes, sir," grunted the large Klingon.

Captain Kirk looked at the burly Klingon. *Trust a Klingon to rely on brawn rather than brains!*

"Rider Yen, Trooper Tol, these are Eglants. Choose one each. Your first task is to tame it." Borack led them over to the corral.

Tol stepped forward and picked out a nervous looking animal. Tricia studied the group and chose a strong, intelligent looking one.

Tol set about taming his mount. He used a number of cruel and harsh ways to get the poor Eglant to submit to his power.

While Tricia was waiting for the equipment Captain Kirk had asked the Enterprise to send down, she began to tame her mount. She stroked its head and offered it some of the titbits she always had to reward Enterprise Too. Patiently she taught the animal to respond to her voice. She adjusted the bridle that had just arrived to fit, and gently coaxed him to accept it.

The saddle was another matter altogether. The Eglant was quiet until she was finally sitting in it, then he began to buck. Tricia held on, but finally he threw her off.

Dr. McCoy ran to her aid, but she was already up and brushing her backside.

"Don't worry about me. I'm all right - only my pride is hurt." She turned back to the now quiet Eglant. "I think, my friend, that you would prefer me to ride you without the saddle."

During this time the Klingon was already on his way. Tricia set off, pausing only to collect the information which would help her to solve the first test from an Obada Elder. She had a wool poncho on over her uniform, and her stetson as a protection against the elements.

The three Enterprise officers watched her go.

"You know, Bones, there are times when Rider Yen looks like a man out of one of those old cowboy movies. At this moment she reminds me of a Mexican bandit."

"So she does. All she needs are two old-fashioned gunbelts slung across her shoulders and a sombrero in place of that stetson," McCoy agreed as Tricia faded into the distance.

Tol had been baffled by the first test, which was set at a crossroads in a forest clearing, so he decided to wait for Rider Yen to appear and see how she handled the puzzle. He took his Eglant into the nearest part of the forest and hid among the trees, crouching down as he heard Tricia approaching.

A stone stood in the middle of the clearing. Tricia dismounted and walked over to the stone, leading her Eglant by the reins. She muttered the rhyme she had been given - Tol had forgotten it - while she studied the stone.

Suddenly the solution hit her and with a stick she began to draw four lines, each leading away from the stone at right angles. Anyone looking at it from above would have seen a cross with the stone at the centre. Between the four main lines Tricia made a few more smaller ones. A Federation man would have recognised the simple sundial she had made.

Again Tricia circled the stone, muttering the rhyme. A shadow cast by the stone onto the sundial gave her the direction to take. She jumped onto her Eglant and set off down the path.

Tol emerged from his hiding place and studied Tricia's work. He could not understand it, and kicked the dust in frustration, erasing some of the lines. He didn't need them, anyway. He collected his Eglant and followed Tricia.

The judge who had watched over this test set off to report to Borack.

At the next stage of the challenge the judge attending to the test released one of a pair of Panis, small dog-like animals with

green spiky fur, from his hiding place as Tricia arrived. Both Panis were injured, and were trained to lead the contestants to the next stage - but only if they were properly treated.

Tricia spotted the Panis as it limped into the clearing. She coaxed her Eglant towards the injured animal and slid off its back slowly, so as not to startle the Panis. The Eglant began to eat some of the vegetation.

"Come, my friend, let Tricia take a look at your leg." She spoke softly as she crouched down before the Panis.

Tol paused in the trees and waited.

Tricia coaxed the Panis with a titbit from her pocket. "Hmm, my friend," she said, gingerly feeling the injured limb. "Stay here while I make some splints for your leg."

She found a suitable sapling and with a pocket knife cut a length from it. She trimmed the stick and split it in two as she returned to the waiting animal. Using a ribbon from one of her plaits she bound the leg. The Panis hobbled about and then set off, pausing at the edge of the clearing.

Tricia laughed. "Wait for me." Using a convenient tree stump, she climbed back onto her Eglant and followed the Panis.

Tol sneered at what he had just witnessed. *What a lot of fuss and nonsense that girl goes through to get nowhere,* he thought. He entered the clearing, where the second injured animal was waiting. Tol wasted no time, and killed it before setting off after Tricia.

The judge who had released the two Panis left to report the results of his test.

Tricia had followed her Panis friend until it stopped at the end of its job.

"Thank you, my friend." Tricia checked his leg and fussed him, then straightening up she studied the number of gateways, each leading to a passage in a maze. The right one would take her through to the mountains and woods again.

She pondered for a while before she chose one. Taking the one that seemed the most unlikely, she urged her Eglant into the passage - as it happened, that passage was the right one.

Tol did not pause as he followed Tricia into the passage.

The judge collected the Panis and hurried on his way.

Tricia soon emerged from the maze and was heading up a narrow track that wove its way up a mountainside. The ground dropped away steeply on her left. The path came out onto a ridge, where the mountain dropped away on both sides.

The next stage of the test was set at the end of the ridge, where the path became the floor of a valley. At the entrance of the valley a wall of 1.5 metres had been erected across the path.

Tricia stopped at the obstacle, trying to see the ground on the

other side of the wall by craning her neck. She could see the path continuing on its way on the other side. She slipped off her Eglant and leaped at the wall, pulling herself up so that she could see the state of the ground below the wall, then she let herself drop down again and returned to her Eglant.

"Well, my friend," Tricia said to the animal, "do you think you can jump it?"

The Eglant tossed its head. Tricia leaped onto its back and they headed away down the path.

The judge at this section watched with puzzlement. He strained himself as much as he could so that he was able to see what was happening without giving himself away. He still could not see where Tricia had gone. He relaxed as they came galloping up the path, and with a magnificent leap flew over the wall, landing safely on the other side.

Tol did not stop as he forced his Eglant to follow suite.

The judge headed back to the village, pleased with his judgement.

By this time Tricia had left the valley and was searching for the path, which had petered out soon after. She glanced around her until she spotted it reappearing at the bottom of the slope where she had stopped. Since Tricia felt she was likely to slide off the Eglant's back she got off and carefully led the animal down the slope to the path.

Tol paused and looked around him. He was just in time to see Rider Yen's back as she once again disappeared into more woods. *This is easy, he thought. Let the lady do all the work and I can reap all the benefits.* He kicked his Eglant on down the hill.

Tricia soon arrived at another obstruction. Eglants don't like water. The path went across a stream in a shallow but wide ford. Rider Yen tried to urge the Eglant on, but the animal would not budge one step. Tricia turned him around and tried again, with the same result.

"Okay, my friend, I give up. How about a compromise. Let's find a place where you can jump it."

They followed the stream along its path until they found a suitable spot and jumped it beautifully.

Tricia patted the Eglant. "Thank you, my friend."

Tol had also reached the ford, and like Tricia's his Eglant refused to cross the stream. Using a switch that he had cut earlier, the man beat his Eglant until it gave in. With short nervous steps it began to cross the stream, but halfway across it panicked and began to buck. Tol was thrown off into a deeper part of the stream just before the ford. When he finally caught up with the animal, which had bolted, he gave it another good whipping before setting off after Tricia.

The path wove its way through trees that were in bloom, and in this peaceful wood Tricia began to relax. She no longer cared if she was the winner of the contest. Reaching up she plucked a couple of blooms from an overhanging branch, tucking one into her hair and the other into the Eglant's headband.

Tol was shadowing her. He smiled to himself as he watched her picking the blooms. *How like an Earth girl*, he sneered to himself.

Unknown to the pair of them they had now reached the final part of the test. The path gradually began to get rocky until it finally ended in a horseshoe corral situated halfway up a mountainside. A cave entrance stood out like a black shadow in the cliff wall. A line of narrow ledge steps led up to the cave, in which was the holy stone of Eric. Tricia jumped off her Eglant and tied it up. Gingerly, she edged her way up to the cave.

Tol arrived and soon realised the situation. He sat down and waited for Tricia to leave the cave. *When she emerges I will attack and kill her. Then I will return in triumph with the stone and tell her Captain that the girl has met with an accident.* He had decided on his plan.

Tricia emerged from the cave and slowly came down the way that she had gone up. A small pouch hung on a string from her belt.

At the bottom of the steps, Tol attacked. Tricia, though caught out by the surprise attack, returned the assault and the pair fought hard. They tumbled on the ground and rolled around, punches flying.

Then the Klingon's head hit a rock and he was stunned. Tricia leapt to her feet and grabbed his disruptor, which had fallen from his holster during the battle. He was still dazed as she removed his belt and secured his feet together with it. When he stirred, Tricia aimed the disruptor at him.

Meanwhile the judge had clambered down from his watching post. "I will help you, girl. An Empire which acts upon the weakness of others is not the power for our people to join."

"Thank you. This Klingon is now in disgrace, as he has allowed me to get the better of him. Let us now humiliate him even more," she said, beginning to enjoy herself despite the aches and pains. "You - over your saddle!" she commanded, waving the disruptor.

The Klingon leapt halfway over the saddle as he was unable to swing a leg over to sit astride. Tricia seized his collar and pulled him over a bit more. While the Obada held the disruptor trained on the Klingon, she tied his hands together with her second hair ribbon, then using her belt she bound Tol's hands and feet together under the Eglant's belly. The Eglant bucked, and tossed Tol a little. The Klingon grunted.

"Make the most of the journey, my friend." Tricia stroked the Eglant and slipped it a few treats - she had seen the wounds Tol had inflicted on the animal.

The judge gave her a leg-up onto her own Eglant, and then handed her the reins of Tol's. Together they set off.

"This way," the man said. "It is quicker than the route you took to come here."

Captain Kirk and the others were treated to another sight straight out of a Western. Tricia was leading a second Eglant with the Klingon slung over his saddle as if he was dead. Then the Eglant bucked, and the 'dead' man grunted.

Tricia approached her Captain. Kirk looked his much-battered Rider over as she tossed him a pouch.

"Here, Captain - the holy stone of Eric. If you will excuse me, I will give Captain Varon his gift. I don't want him to go away empty-handed." She steered her Eglant to where the Klingon captain stood waiting.

The group of Starfleet officers - apart from Spock - were laughing at the sight of the Klingon prisoner. Tol lifted his head at the sound but dropped it again, as if the effort was too much. Kirk shook his head as his eyes filled with tears caused by the effort of laughing. *Rider Yen is full of surprises*, he thought.

Tricia had drawn up in front of the Klingons. "Captain Varon, your man, I believe," she said, leaning over her Eglant's neck as she handed him the reins.

Captain Varon was not amused by the sight. *Tol will be dealt with severely later*, he thought, relishing the prospect of how he might punish the man.

Borack and his group arrived. "Gentlemen, we have made our decision. Captain Kirk, you can be proud of your crew member. She had the patience and understanding to care about her Eglant; she even compromised with it at one stage. She approached each stage of the journey with caution. A barrier we had erected, she studied before jumping it. In the end, where the Klingon would have killed her she brought her rival back alive to his captain, but in an unusual position that I noticed you found amusing." Borack smiled a little.

Kirk laughed. "Way back in our past, some of Rider Yen's ancestors used to bring home their dead that way."

"Very interesting. Now, Captain Varon, your man was unable to solve the first test, so he waited for Rider Yen and followed her throughout the rest of the tests. He killed the Panis we had set as a guide, and he intended to kill Rider Yen. We feel this reflects your race's traits, and that if we joined with your Empire and then disagreed with some of your regulations, you would not hesitate to enslave us and kill anyone who does not comply with your views. Our final decision is that we welcome the United Federation of Planets as our allies."

Captain Varon scowled but could do nothing. *Tol will die as slowly and as painfully as I can make it*, he thought. At a signal his party gathered around him and they vanished in a shimmer of light. Shortly after, their ship pulled out of orbit.

Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock went to talk with Borack and his men, making further arrangements.

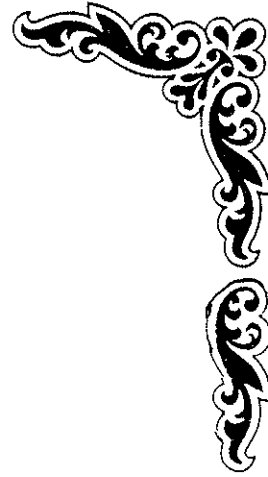
Dr. McCoy started to treat Tricia. "You're a lucky lady," he told her, "no serious damage. Come on, let's get back to the ship, where there is a certain young lady waiting for her mother."

Enterprise Too almost flew to Tricia as she emerged from the transporter, but a firm hand on her headcollar held her back. Tricia greeted the foal with a hug before Dr. McCoy took his patient off to sickbay.

Captain Kirk returned later, well pleased with the outcome. Once again he found himself blessing the Administration blunderer who had transferred Rider Yen to the Enterprise.



home



Vulcan, hot and burning,
its people unemotional and cold...
causing so much pain to a young child.
But as a piece of coal by pressure
is transformed into a diamond,
the child grows and matures
under the pressure of logic and non-emotion.

The Human half which wants to cry
is quietly, full of determination,
turned into a source of strength.
Beauty in a simple verse
is appreciated and enjoyed,
and comfort found in the song of a bird.
Replenished, the child's mind continues to unfold.

A brilliant scientific mind
emerges, spurred on by will and need to know.
Human and Vulcan, a unique combination.
The Human half, denied to the outward world,
is always there to help when logic cannot.
And on a ship full of Humans
the Vulcan child finds its destiny.

The trained, highly intelligent mind
a well of knowledge and help to the ship's Captain;
the warm, feeling Human heart
a strong wind of unquestioning support in the Captain's back...
The crew has come to trust the Vulcan,
And Spock, the lonely child of yesterday,
has finally found his home.

Elizabeth Rackel



IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A DOCTOR

by

Joyce Devlin



I was the only person in the Officers' Mess when the Captain entered, crossed to the food dispenser, and ordered a chicken sandwich. Removing it from the dispenser he then crossed to my table, and laid his plate down with a clatter. I got the message, and looked up from the medical journal I was reading.

"Anything interesting?" Jim asked as he drew his seat out and wearily sank down into it.

"Kinda. It's an article on artificial insemination by donor. Four of the new crewmembers were conceived in that fashion, so I decided to review the subject by reading up some articles I'd previously skimmed through in the medical journals," I informed him as I eyed him over, taking a mental note of what he was having for lunch.

"Bones?"

"What?" I asked, wondering what he was going to come away with next. When Jim uses that tone I always look out.

"What chance would there be if a donor wanted to try and find out if his... contribution had ever been used?" He smiled; over the years I'd come to read that smile...

"Not a lot, unless the donor was a medical officer who was entitled to the information," I informed him. "And if you don't start eating a proper meal instead of that junk I'll be placing you on a diet that consists of at least two solid meals a day." Okay, so I may sound like a nag, but a chicken sandwich is no meal for an over-worked Starship Captain.

"Do you have access?" Jim enquired through a mouthful of bread, and paying my threat no attention at all.

"I do. As Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise I hold the necessary computer clearance code to allow me access to the files, provided I can supply the other details to fit the code - that is vital." *I wonder why he's so interested?* I thought to myself as I supplied the information.

"So, how would you go about it?"

I shrugged before I replied with my own question. "Jim, are you saying that you have contributed to the A.I.D. bank?" My eyebrows had climbed about as high as Spock's could have. This I didn't believe, but I was hearing it with my own ears - and from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

"Yes," came his reply. I was waiting for it, but it still came as a bombshell. "When I was eighteen, twenty-two years ago. I guess it seemed like a good idea at the time."

"And now you'd like to know if your contribution was ever used, right?" There was no way I could condone Jim's actions, though; I myself had been asked to donate at one time, but had gracefully declined, and I could imagine the reason behind the action was financial.

"Well... er... yes and no, Bones. One one hand it would be nice to know if there were any... results; on the other hand, what if I'm responsible for a handicapped child, or something like that?"

"That's one point you can stop bothering about. A.I.D. were careful that they did not use anyone with a tendency to that side of things."

"I see. So if mine was used there would be no chance of anything... drastic happening?"

"Sort of, but anything can happen when a woman is carrying a child."

"I see," Jim replied as he rose from the table and crossed to the food dispenser, returning with another chicken sandwich.

"I don't believe it! You're not going to eat another one of those, are you?" I complained. As Chief Medical Officer I'm responsible for the health of the crew, and with Jim Kirk it's a losing battle to try and get him to eat properly.

"Yes, why?" Jim enquired as he bit into the sandwich.

"Well, you know what I said about a diet." I finished my coffee and stood up. "Sorry, but I've got to rush. New crew medicals start this afternoon, so I'm going to be busy. See you later."

"Not if you're putting me on a diet you won't." Jim smiled as a frown appeared on my face. "I may have to beam down to the starbase if our new orders come through, and anyway, you gave me a clean bill of health only last week, remember?"

I had to laugh as I walked towards the turbolift, shaking my head as I did so.

By the time I entered sickbay I had almost forgotten Jim's line of questioning as I prepared my mind for the medicals that lay ahead of me. Ugh - the one thing I hate.

As I went through to the treatment area I heard one of the young nurses talking to Christine Chapel.

"Honestly, Chris, he's so like the Captain you'd think he was his son..." On seeing me standing there she hurriedly cleared the treatment trolley away.

"Who was she on about?" I questioned as I picked up my notes.

"Ensign Steven Larson, Doctor. there's a striking resemblance to Captain Kirk, but you'll see that for yourself. He's in there, waiting for his medical. Mr. Spock sent him along," Chris informed me.

"Are these his medical records?" I asked, pointing to the

computer disc she was holding.

"Yes."

I took the disc from her and inserted it into the medical computer. It was a habit I'd developed over the years. For the long established crew members it was purely routine, but for the newcomers it gave valuable insight into their medical condition and history.

I can tell you my eyes nearly popped out of my head when I saw the A.I.D. reference code. Well, curiosity got the better of me once again. I pressed in my own clearance code and reference and waited. It took some time, but at last the computer displayed the information I had asked for.

The file gave a scant picture of the medical history of Larson's parents and the reason for the A.I.D. unit accepting them as possible candidates, but it was the descriptions that caught my eye.

LARSON, Commodore Dale	Donor ref M.U. 386/4975
	Cadet James T. Kirk
Height	5' 10"
Weight	12 stone
Complexion	Fair
Eye colour	Hazel
Hair	Light brown
Age	40
I.Q.	125
Blood group	B+

I flipped off the computer, pressed the small white button on the desk beside it, and waited. I could only stare in disbelief as I found myself facing the young officer who did so much resemble Jim Kirk.

Knowing what I did, the resemblance should not have been a surprise, but it was; yet there were certain differences. Larson was 6' tall, that was 2" taller than Jim; he had surprisingly dark hair and deep brown eyes, and was distinctly slimmer and probably fitter than his donor-father, but the fact still remained.

There was no way I could tell Jim that this young man was his son, for the information had been entrusted to me as a doctor, and that was that as far as I was concerned. I went on with the medical, but I can tell you that by the time I returned to the office my mind was in a turmoil.

So Jim's donation was used, and the result is aboard the Enterprise, I thought as I stored away the medical results on the computer. Starfleet's slipped up - or have they...

As it was, Starfleet would not consider them to be father and son, as legally Larson's father was Dale Larson; Jim was only his biological donor-father, not the man who had devoted the last 21 years of his life to him, so if they had checked at all they had probably taken the view that there was no emotional tie between them; they were, after all, complete strangers to each other.

But, I knew Jim better. He was bound to consider himself morally responsible to the young man, and there was no way Larson

could miss adding two and two together. He must know he had a donor-father, and if he could not see the resemblance... Well, he wouldn't be in Starfleet if he couldn't add up.

I learned later that day that Jim had beamed down to the starbase had received some new orders, a rescue mission. Seemingly a small survey ship had had engine failure, and was in need of a tow, so we were ordered to give what assistance was necessary. I got down to the task of preparing sickbay, just in case its facilities were needed.

I was on the bridge when we rendezvoused with the stricken survey vessel. It was very clear that she had in fact been under heavy fire, and was badly damaged beyond any hope of repair.

"Uhura, contact the Appla and advise them to stand by for boarding. Bones..." Kirk turned to me, "Have a medical team ready and meet us in the transporter room in five minutes."

I had already anticipated his request, and was moving as he spoke.

Soon all the survivors of the damaged vessel were safely aboard the Enterprise, and my sickbay looked like a battlefield. As for the paperwork...

Well, I sat down and got started, and what did I discover? Only that four of the crew were A.I.D fathered, and by the same donor - M.U. 386/4975. Yep, all Jim's. Boy, my head didn't half hurt.

Jim's going to love this, I told myself as I filed the last report. Problems? I could see an unlimited number of problems occurring. There was nothing for it - I'd have to talk frankly to him. Between one thing and another, there's just no way A.I.D. siblings were going to be able to remain aboard. That was five now - how many more? Okay, four of them would be going ashore, but still, it presented a problem.

God, if Jim ever finds out! No, I'm going to have to call the Surgeon General and find out all I can about A.I.D. and what the legal rights are. I placed the call and waited.

The information I received I did not like. I just had to talk to Jim. So far I'd found out that Starfleet had ten offspring on record!

I found him in his cabin, head buried in paperwork.

"What can I do for you, Bones?" he asked as I entered.

"Jim, just how many donations did you give to A.I.D?" I asked, trying to keep the curiosity out of my voice.

"Oh, five or six," Jim said, off-handedly.

I looked at him, suspicion winning the battle with ten offspring and a better than 100% success rate. "Five or six?" I asked accusingly.

"Well, nine or ten," he offered almost placatingly.

"Nine or ten."

"Well... maybe a couple of times more."

"Were you showing off, or something? I'd have thought once or twice was enough for anyone's ego."

"It... er... it wasn't quite like that. You see, there was this girl..."

I could only shake my head. "Have you any idea how many children you could have fathered?"

Jim just shook his head. "I never gave it much thought. The programme was cancelled a year or two later. I thought my donations would have been destroyed with the others. How many did you say...?"

"I didn't, but at the last count, ten in Starfleet," I informed him.

"Can... Can you find out?" he asked. He'd gone rather pale, much to my surprise. I'd have thought he would have passed it off.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"I'm not very proud of myself. It wasn't exactly very responsible of me to act like that. I mean, how many couples could meet and fall in love, only to discover that they can't marry because they have the same donor-father - me."

"Jim, if someone is A.I.D. born it's on the birth certificate," I pointed out. "They know, so before they start getting serious they should check their A.I.D number with their partner's just in case."

There was no need to remind him that what they *should* do was not necessarily what they *did* do - he knew that for himself.

"Look, Jim, you did what you had to then," I said. "Think of the people to whom you gave the one thing they could not achieve themselves - a baby. You're not the children's father - the paper you signed to start with stated that you gave up all legal rights to the children. You only provided a seed, nothing else."

I could see the wheels turning as he realised what I said was true - he wasn't the father.

When I left his cabin Jim had aggravated a worry already set in my mind. I made my way back to the computer terminal in my office and punched up Central Records. I gave my clearance number and requested details on the total number of children fathered by A.I.D. donor M.U. 386/4975. There was a brief pause before the screen flickered into life.

I stared at the terminal, horrified. Someone, somewhere had blundered - *must* have blundered - because if those figures were right Jim must have been donating up to three times a week for months, and *every single drop of his donations had been used!*

Boy oh boy, why does it always happen to me? It shouldn't - but it does.



OF LOYALTY AND EMPIRES

by

Alinda Alain

He had examined the room from top to bottom fifteen times, to no avail. There was no way out.

They had captured him two weeks ago.

Sighing, James T. Kirk, formerly Captain of the I.S.S. Enterprise, the most feared and successful enforcer of the Terran Galactic Empire's tyrannical rule, settled into a reclining couch-chair to wait.

It was almost a year to the day that his First Officer, Spock, had persuaded him to join the Rebel forces against the Empire. Oh, he had resisted the transition for almost a year and a half since that fluke storm which had sent him, McCoy, Scott and Uhura to that alternate universe of a peaceful, galactic alliance known as the United Federation of Planets. But his Spock, thoroughly contaminated by that other Kirk, had been persistent, had even deserted him for almost two months.

Kirk shivered. During those two months, he'd known loneliness and insecurity like never before. Five attempts had been made on his life. Two, his personal guards had foiled. The other three he'd not known about until Spock's return. It seemed the highly resourceful and always cautious Vulcan had left four of his most trusted operatives to keep a watchful eye on the Captain, which accounted for the failure of the other three attempts.

For a long time, Kirk hadn't been sure whether it was for his protection or the Vulcan's.

Now, however, he was sure - and nothing Admiral Komack and the others said or did could convince him otherwise.

Spock sat with steepled fingers as the argument whirled all about him.

Actually, they - the leaders of the Rebel forces - were all in agreement; they wished to organise a suicide team to invade Imperial Starfleet Headquarters and kill Kirk before the Captain was persuaded to betray the Rebellion.

"Kirk knows far too much about our operations, our ships and personnel disposition," High Councilman Ulric said, directing his remarks at Spock. "He is too dangerous to leave in the hands of the Empire. Surely, Spock, you realise that."

"Yes, Spock. Kirk is too dangerous," another said. "For all we know, he has already begun to talk."

"You are mistaken, Commodore," Spock replied.

All eyes focused on him, since he was the only dissenter in the committee.

"Kirk has never been too pleased with our efforts to overthrow the Empire," Utric reminded. "For all we know, he was an Imperial spy. How long did it take to convince him? Are you sure you ever did, Spock?"

Spock drew a deep breath and looked each person in the committee in the eye.

"Jim Kirk has not betrayed the Rebellion, nor will he. I know my Captain better than any of you could possibly understand." He suddenly rose to his feet. "I grow tired of this... discussion. None of you will make any move or give an order which threatens Jim Kirk's life. Arrangements have already been made to rescue him from Imperial Fleet's headquarters."

They looked at him in astonishment, but had no chance to question him. Spock had turned and was walking out.

"Jim. Be reasonable," Commodore Gary Mitchell, old friend and comrade of their Academy days, argued. "I've never known you to play the fool. Tell us what you know of the Rebel's plans, strength and supply sources. You know they can't possibly win against the Empire. We are more than willing to believe that you 'joined' the Rebels in order to obtain crucial knowledge to bring back to us. Why, we've already begun to circulate that fact."

Mitchell broke off as Kirk lunged out of the chair and reached for his throat. The two burly guards standing just behind Kirk's chair caught him and forced him back down into the seat.

"You see, Jim," Mitchell grinned. "There's no going back. We've made it impossible. Your loss was sorely felt within the Fleet. Now accept what must be and tell us all you know. If you don't - " the grin faded - "you'll be executed for treason."

Kirk sat silently for several minutes. It was a lost cause, he realised. He couldn't go back. There had been many among the Rebels who had doubted him from the beginning. Now they would feel more than justified. He really should stop playing the fool - he had no wish to die.

And yet... Spock was an integral part of the Rebellion. There would be no way to betray it without getting the Vulcan killed.

Hazel eyes looked up to meet Mitchell's expectant gaze.

"No," Kirk said simply, with finality.

"Is everything in readiness?" Spock spoke into the specially constructed transmitter/receiver unit.

"Yes, Mr. Spock. It's all as you requested," came Montgomery Scott's answering reply. "Marlena has Captain Sulu occupied. Uhura is 'entertaining' First Officer Chekov. I've sabotaged the

Enterprise's engines and weapons. McCoy has given the bridge crew a time-delayed sedative." A quiet chuckle. "Mr. Spock - you're a genius and a half. Only you could plan such an ingenious take-over of an Imperial Starship. I take it we're going after Captain Kirk?"

"You are correct, Mr. Scott."

"To rescue or to kill?"

"To rescue."

"I thought as much. We'll be ready."

Now that they knew he would not willingly betray the Rebellion, Kirk expected the end of the gentle, persuasive treatment. When a guard brought his evening meal tray, he left it on the table untouched, suspicious of being drugged.

Of course, there would be no avoiding it in the end. One way or another they would get the information out of him. Kirk determined to make it as difficult and long as possible.

Idly, he contemplated suicide, but discarded the idea almost immediately. He didn't think he was coward enough to take his life by his own hands, but in an escape attempt...

A slight commotion outside his door drew his attention. Rising from the chair, Kirk waited.

The door slid aside.

For a brief instant, Kirk felt relief and joy sweep over him. The person in the doorway was Vulcan. Not Spock, but perhaps one of his loyal operatives.

Then the Vulcan moved towards him - with murder in the dark eyes.

Self preservation and the experience gained in his workouts with Spock took over. He evaded the Vulcan, taking the defensive, retreating. He knew better than to be caught by that vulcanoid strength. But the room was small, and there was only so much evasion to be done.

In less than a minute, the Vulcan had him cornered.

He decided to forego retreating, and attack. Even as he moved, Kirk knew it was doomed to failure.

The Vulcan ignored the crippling punch aimed at his lower abdomen and locked powerful fingers around Kirk's throat.

As the pressure reached bone-crushing proportions, Kirk's vision blurred. To his mind's eye came the vision of Spock. Somehow, even now, he found it hard to believe that Spock would order him killed.

A sudden, familiar pain touched every nerve in his body - a phaser set on stun.

He felt himself - and the Vulcan - fall, and knew nothing more.

Spock, along with six of his operatives and Vulcan/Romulan allies, materialised in the transporter room of the Enterprise. Waiting to greet him and give a report were Mr. Scott, Uhura and technician Kyle.

"Welcome aboard, Mr. Spock - " Scott began, but broke off abruptly as the Vulcan took one step and fell to his knees.

Two of his allies, T'Lex of Romulus and Sarai of Vulcan, knelt beside him.

"Spock, what is it?" the woman T'Lex asked.

"My Captain... Pain..."

She reached out, took his arm. "Dead?"

"No," Spock whispered, shuddering. He rose slowly, shakily, to his feet.

"Apparently they have dispensed with the painless forms of persuasion," she observed.

Spock nodded. "He must proceed quickly." He addressed Scott. "Sulu? Chekov?"

"Mr. Chekov is... resting." Uhura smiled, her eyes reflecting a gleeful twinkle.

The transporter door slid aside and Marlana appeared in the entrance. In her hand was a dagger with bloodstains on the blade.

Her eyes found Spock.

"Captain Sulu is dead," she announced, her expression grim but content. Though she had had sense enough not to show any resistance when Sulu, under Imperial orders, had taken command of the Enterprise and made her his woman, the resentment had run long and deep. Now at last she was free.

"That was not necessary, Lieutenant," Spock said.

"Yes, it was."

Spock decided to leave it at that. There was little time for anything else. Jim Kirk was in danger - and in pain. That could not be tolerated for long.

And if Kirk had been harmed beyond repair, Spock determined to leave every person at Imperial Fleet Headquarters dead.

Kirk stirred to consciousness. A familiar voice assured him that all was well.

"Chris..." he murmured, opening his eyes to look into the blue eyes of Dr. Christine Chapel. A great sense of peace came over him.

"Easy, Captain. You're all right now. And quite safe,"

Christine assured. "Commodore Mitchell is here."

The sense of well-being abruptly vanished.

Mitchell.

He was still an Imperial prisoner. Seeing Christine had made him think that he had been rescued by Spock.

Christine was another of the Vulcan's long-term plants. Close to Imperial Headquarters and all its leaders, she was doing to the Empire exactly what the Empire had wanted Jim Kirk to do to the Rebellion.

Looking into her eyes, Kirk saw a warning.

"Jim. How do you feel?" Mitchell came to stand beside the bed.

"Sore," Kirk answered.

"You're lucky. You were almost dead. If I hadn't come by when I did... Yes. It was I who saved you. I warned you, Jim. You owe the Rebellion nothing. They've put out an assassination contract on you."

Kirk closed his eyes and turned away. "If you don't mind, Gary, I'd like to rest a while, to think. Then... Then we can talk."

"Great," Mitchell beamed, placing a comradely hand on Kirk's shoulder

When he was sure they were alone, Kirk opened his eyes and focused on Christine.

"Is it your intention to betray the Rebellion?" Christine's tone was curious, light, a subtle warning that there could be listeners.

"They've ordered my death."

"Yes. *They* have."

Kirk stiffened, reading the meaning in her tone. It suggested truth, but with a catch. His eyes looked into hers, asking, *Spock?*

No. Never.

Sighing, Kirk let his eyes close for a moment. Then he opened them to focus on her again.

Chris. Are you for the Rebellion or Spock?

Spock. And in her blue eyes he saw a promise of help.

Spock had the Enterprise Imperial crew replaced with his own, then had Scott send an urgent message to Imperial Headquarters to report the capture of several important Rebel leaders. The response was as expected - return at once.

"Have you received any more impressions?" T'Lex stepped down beside the bridge command chair.

"No."

She drew her breath in quietly. There was a lot of tension radiating from Spock.

"Your concern is for him - not the damage his capture could do to the Rebellion," she observed.

The Vulcan's dark eyes met hers unflinchingly. "Did you expect otherwise?" he challenged.

"No. But now that it is becoming apparent to our allies, there may be trouble. Doubts. Kirk is not well accepted among the Rebels. Many have suffered great loss because of his actions on behalf of the Empire."

Spock nodded. It had been his original wish to keep Kirk close to him at all times or to send the Human to Vulcan or Romulus where family and friends could protect him until the overthrow of the Empire was complete. But Kirk, being a leader and a doer, had resisted such pampering, insisting on taking an active role. They had argued one too many times about Kirk's place among the Rebel forces.

In fact, it had been his defiance of one of Spock's wishes that had led to Kirk's capture.

Spock had protested adamantly against Kirk's taking a shuttle probe to spy on an Imperial Starbase. The Human had waited until Spock was called away for a status report with their Vulcan/Romulan allies, then approached the duty officer and ordered the probe. By the time Spock returned it was too late, even though he had set out in pursuit immediately.

"Romulan destroyer fleet calling Enterprise." Subcommander Savid's voice came over the com.

"Spock here. Go ahead, Savid."

"Will follow you at one thousand kilometers distance and await your call."

"Thank you, Savid. Remember - keep the Fleet under the cloaking device until I have Kirk." If alerted too soon, Spock feared the Imperial Command would order the Human killed immediately.

"Understood, Commander," Savid assured.

"Good evening, gentlemen." Christine greeted the two guards stationed at Kirk's door.

"Doctor." They smiled at her.

"You wish to see the prisoner?" one of the guards enquired. "I have no authorisation to let you in."

"That's all right." She smiled, putting a hand upon his arm. "I just want to look in to see that he's resting okay."

The guard thought he felt a prick, but paid it no heed. He turned and unlocked the door. Christine moved aside, bumping

slightly into the other guard, her hand clutching his arm a moment for support. Then she stepped forward, looking into the room.

Kirk lay on her bed, apparently asleep.

"Thank you." She smiled and turned to leave. She took five steps before the thud of two falling bodies came from behind her.

Hurrying back, she searched the first guard for the key.

"Captain!" she called when the door slid open.

He was awake instantly, sitting up warily.

"I've come to help you escape," she explained.

Kirk got to his feet quickly and came to join her. "How?"

"First we get out of this building. I've got two friends who will pose as guard/escort. Once outside, there is a fast scoutship available. Mitchell's," she grinned. "It has automatic, absolute clearance."

"But the entrance code?"

"I have that." Her smile was knowing, mocking, and Kirk realised that she had made the most of her position, had used it to get close to those who most threatened the Rebellion, and learned all their secrets.

"Your place here?" he enquired.

"Is no longer needed." She took his hand, leading him down the hall. "I know all that I need to know - and getting you out now is top priority for Spock and the Rebellion. Mitchell plans on using drugs first thing tomorrow. Powerful drugs. Unsafe. They'd either break or kill."

Her two friends, the guard/escorts, waiting at the end of the corridor. Together, the four walked through the semi-deserted base as if they had the right to do so.

No-one stopped or questioned them.

High Councilman Ulric had taken matters into his own hands. Christine Chapel was not the only Rebel spy in Imperial Headquarters; but she was Spock's.

The rest - at least five - had other orders.

Kill Jim Kirk at all cost.

They were almost at the scoutship when the first explosion rocked the command centre. It was quickly followed by five more.

"What's going on?" Kirk yelled, looking back. All the explosions were occurring in those parts of the building that they'd just left.

"Run!" Christine ordered, guessing at what was happening. The four covered the remaining distance at a run.

"Jim!"

The voice was Gary Mitchell's.

Looking back, they saw Mitchell staggering towards them. Kirk hesitated, then returned back.

"Are you crazy?" Christine grabbed his arm.

"We can use a hostage." Kirk pulled away and went to help Mitchell.

Minutes later they were in the scoutship and lifting off. Mitchell, now seated, his injuries tended by a reluctant Chapel, took in the situation.

"Which way are you headed?" the Commodore enquired.

"To freedom and safety," Chapel answered.

"You mean to the Rebels." Mitchell turned to Kirk. "I was on my way to your room when the explosions started. Jim, all of them were in or near the wing we had you in. I was coming to tell you that there's a Rebel Fleet headed this way. Jim, don't be a fool. These people are going to kill you!"

Kirk was silent, thoughtful for a moment, then he shrugged and looked Mitchell in the eye. "If they kill me, so be it. I've made my choice."

"That abominable half-breed has warped your mind!" Mitchell snarled.

"Perhaps. But are you suggesting that I'd receive a different fate from the Empire?"

"I've told you what we're willing to do for you, the story we've circulated."

"For the Rebels' benefit."

"For everyone," Mitchell insisted. "Jim - please. You're being offered a second chance. Take it!"

Silence. Then -

"Thank you. No, Gary."

"You fool," Mitchell said.

Kirk nodded and turned to check on their course.

"Commander!" T'Lex turned to Spock. "Sensors are picking up an Imperial Fleet scoutship."

"I know. Thank you," the Vulcan answered, his tone distant.

"You know?"

"Yes." Spock hit the intercom unit, requesting the transporter room.

T'Pol considered for about one second. "Captain Kirk is aboard that scoutship," she reasoned.

Spock nodded and ordered the scoutship brought aboard, its passengers beamed into the transporter room immediately.

The five figures solidified in the transporter room of the Enterprise. Kirk, Chapel and her two allies had phasers drawn, aimed at Mitchell who wore an expression of triumph - until the Vulcan and Romulans walked through the door.

"What's going on?" Mitchell demanded of Engineer Scott who stood at the transporter console. "Rebel prisoners with freedom of the ship, without guards? Where's Sulu? Chekov?"

"Mr. Sulu is dead. Commander Chekov is confined to his quarters. Commodore." Spock addressed Mitchell, but the dark eyes were focused on Jim Kirk.

Kirk and the other three slowly lowered their weapons.

"Welcome aboard, Captain," the Vulcan said. "I am gratified to find you uninjured and free."

Kirk inclined his head towards Chapel. "The Doctor helped me escape." Hazel eyes met Spock's gaze unflinchingly. "Seconds before someone blew my detention centre into atoms."

Dark eyes went to Christine. "Thank you, Doctor. I am in your debt. Whatever you require of me that is in my power to give is yours."

The uncertain tension in the room lifted a little. But a little was not enough for Jim Kirk. He stepped off the transporter pad and moved to face Spock.

"I need to know where I stand, Commander, with the Rebel forces. For what it's worth, I didn't tell the Empire anything."

Spock's gaze settled upon him, the dark eyes moving over him in examination. "Your standing with the Rebellion, and whether or not you gave the Empire any information, is irrelevant," he told Kirk simply. "I came for you."

The Human drew in his breath sharply. Hazel eyes widened, then took on a misty brightness. All uncertainty was now gone.

Gary Mitchell, having watched and listened to the exchange between the two, muttered something under his breath.

"As you may have surmised, Captain," Spock continued to Kirk, "I've brought the Enterprise and those of her crew still loyal to you."

"Yes. So I see." Kirk paused as the door slid aside, permitting Uhura and Marlena to enter.

"Jim!"

"Captain!"

Both women quickly moved forward and were embraced by Kirk.

Spock stepped aside and looked up to where Mitchell stood. "Commodore, consider yourself a guest of the Rebellion. And my prisoner. You need not fear any mistreatment or abuse." The Vulcan's gaze shifted back to Kirk for a second, making the message clear. Kirk had come to no harm when in Imperial hands due to Mitchell's painless persuasive attempts; therefore Spock was in a generous mood.

"You people are insane. You'll never win. Not with this soft touch, trusting approach. This will never survive. In case you haven't noticed, this is a rough galaxy," Mitchell declared.

"Yes, Gary." Kirk turned to face his old friend. "What you say is true. Nevertheless, there's hope for that other approach. You see, this other way draws loyalty from the heart, the soul. Not from attainment of power or wealth." Kirk glanced at Spock, who moved to his side. "Tell me, Gary, what would happen if I sent you, Chekov and the others on this ship who are enemies of the Rebellion back to the Empire?" the Captain enquired.

Mitchell stiffened, following Kirk's train of thought.

"Is that what you plan to do, Jim?" he asked.

"No, Gary. No. I've been contaminated by that other approach. I'm learning how to be merciful." Kirk folded his arms and looked up at the Vulcan with affection. "Believe it or not, it can be more fun than torture."

Mitchell's only response was a derisive grunt.

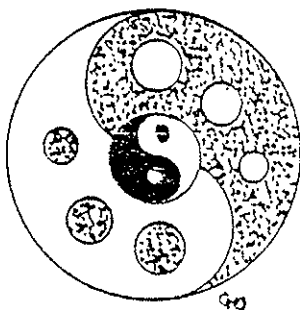
Many hours and light years later, Jim Kirk stood in the centre of the cabin that had been his when he had commanded the Enterprise two years ago, before he'd joined the Rebellion.

"Home at last," he sighed and turned to find Spock standing in the doorway, watching him. "Thank you," he told the Vulcan simply. "For everything."

"You are welcome, Jim."

The two looked into each other's eyes and knew that the Empire and its brutality was ending, that the United Federation of Planets with its peaceful co-operation was truly beginning.

At least, for the two of them.



BARRIERS



by

Linda Bryant



Captain Kirk's body language indicated his interest as he caught a subliminal signal from Uhura at her communications console. Predictably the command seat swivelled as he turned from her to Spock at the science station. Spock had sensed Uhura's increased concentration, and as her eyes widened and turned to his he nodded his confirmation that his sensors had found the source of her signal.

Kirk speculated as he waited. Theirs was the best command team in Starfleet, but the analysts could not explain how or why they achieved such a high performance. Chekov, sitting their side of the bridge in the forward section, was slower than Sulu, sitting next to him, to register a situation. Chekov was more attuned to Spock, Sulu to Kirk and Uhura. Scott was impartial; his response was to the command chair.

In a series of tests every possible simulation, substitution, physical barrier and rearrangement of hardware and personnel had been tested, but the response time to a scenario, taking the best measured as 100, was 96 - 100 with his five officers in their usual positions, 94 - 98 with them in different positions, dropping to a more usual 85 - 87 with other personnel. Even in full link the Intrepid only managed 97.

It was inherently a matter of visual and spatial inspiration that preceded the formation of thought. On the verge of a flash of universal inspiration Kirk's subconscious nudged him, but he lost it as his mouth curved in a smile as he remembered the Intrepid's chagrin. Starfleet Academy scientists were discussing ideas for further tests, and he had thrown in a suggestion - what about re-running the old research into thought guidance?

In the past both Terra and Vulcan had researched its use and abandoned it. The reasons were buried in obscurity and a veil of secrecy - or rather, a high security classification. Kirk had a good intuitive idea why thought guidance had been abandoned for Terrans. The original work had been with thought-guided missiles; there was something erotic about the shape of the functionally designed missiles, and flying was the most basic sex dream. But why had it not worked for Vulcans? Their logical thought paths would not be cluttered by extraneous thoughts as were those of the Humans, and the official explanation that it took too long for the photographic-type imagery of the Vulcan mind to form and be transmitted as a thought command did not wash. Logically they could easily have developed an image form transmitter. Or was it...?

An image of his unformed flash of inspiration hovered, but Kirk's mind was still back with his hormones and visions of flying that missile. Then everything faded.

Chekov was fighting to control the hover car as it hurtled down a narrow dust

road. The edges were banked and covered in dust to car height, and his vision was limited to a tunnel of tree trunks, each bole as it was picked out by the headlamps wearing a different grotesque face of all the nightmares in the universe.

The pace quickened as it does in dreams, and Chekov reluctantly let himself go with the nightmare until he could begin to control. He got a sweating grip on the car and finally slowed and controlled it, to see in dreadful slow clarity the rust-furred corpse of a Siberian fox lying on its side, its muzzle open, spewing the dark blood of its death onto its neck and into the dust at the edge of the roadway.

Kirk felt the cold seeping through the smooth metal compo floor he was lying on. He opened his eyes into pitch darkness.

"Jim? Jim, are you all right?"

Spock. Well, at least he was not alone.

"Spock?" He felt hands supporting his shoulders as he sat up. "I'm okay. What happened?"

Both were held in an inclusive aura, one to the other, each aware that to let go would precipitate them back into limbo. Gradually they extended their senses to embrace the situation. Neither felt real fear. For Kirk each new situation was a command challenge to explore, for Spock every experience was met with curiosity and the force of his personality that was his essence.

Spock sat and evaluated their situation, using all his senses to gather information. Kirk moved. A muttered oath found him Scott.

"Scotty, you okay?"

Scott's reply was lost in Dr. McCoy's characteristic complaint. "Where in hell has that damned transporter scattered my molecules this time? Eh? You tell me that!"

"Hell is hardly appropriate for the ambient temperature here, Doctor."

"But the company belies it."

Kirk found Chekov and Sulu huddled together and silently shaking. Somehow in this situation the sound of laughter would be unfitting.

"McCoy, quit arguing and come and check Chekov and Sulu."

Guided by his voice, Dr. McCoy shuffled towards Kirk. "Dark as Hades in here," he grumbled.

A low murmur of apology reached Kirk's ears, which were being assaulted by Chekov's vocalised fit of the giggles.

Uhura was saying to Spock, "He has something of a one track mind."

The initial euphoric relief that the bridge crew was together and unharmed faded. Touching for contact and warmth, they sat close. Chekov's teeth chattered, and Scott repeated, like a man saying a litany,

"To those who have known colour no darkness is ever absolute."

Command training took over as each evaluated the depth of sensory deprivation. They were on a bare metal compo floor. It was cold, but bearable. The atmosphere was breathable. Gravity was Earth normal. Light and sound were non-existent. Beyond the limits of their presence, of their contact with each other, was an unbreachable force field of their dissolution intensified by a feeling of sliding towards nothingness if the contact with one another was broken.

Kirk surreptitiously pulled Spock closer into his embrace. The Vulcan was suffering most from the cold and enforced contact. Dr. McCoy sat behind them, a hand on both their shoulders, giving warmth. Chekov and Sulu sat to their left, Scott and Uhura to their right. Scott and Uhura were aware of the subtle shifting of Kirk's arms and McCoy's covering his movements.

The undercurrents reminded Uhura of her childhood. The dichotomy of attraction and repulsion, of her heightened sensitivity to her companions, reminded her oddly of... She shrugged the thought away, but... Uhura spoke in her rich contralto, the cadences of her voice strangely hypnotic.

"Neither the sun by day nor the moon by night shall harm you."

Uhura watched the long distant shadows of the camp fire.

"Anastasia, Anastasia, The Spiderman, the Weaver of Dreams, the Catcher of Nightmares, he shall spin his web, his ladder to the stars, and hold you secure in the universe forever."

Projecting her sensuality in a way she normally kept well hidden, Uhura drew the others to her. Instinctively she knew she could reach them on this different communication level.

Uhura remembered, but dimly, when as a small child she had become aware of a gift she could control but dared not give full reign to or explore. It was more, deeper, than sensuality, an essence, a difference from others, a power she possessed.

She was three years old again, intelligent, precocious beyond her years, subliminally aware of the aura of others from last night's initiation ceremony. Her sleep had been disturbed but she was in a strange world of sharpened half images of her mind in a sleeping body.

Norgura, the old witch doctor, understood, and she knew he did, but was repelled and kept her distance, hugging her knowledge to herself. Often waking after a few hours' sleep she would use the gift born in her and close her body down to free her mind. In this state she could often resolve problems and find the reasons for responses she did not understand. Uhura built her barriers young and tried to show only an empathic response. Norgura suspected particularly when Uhura, in pain and fever at seven years old, set herself into a trance she barely controlled. That was the first time she felt herself roll down to her right and away from her body. She twitched, fear bringing her back.

Norgura held his counsel as he watched Uhura pull away from family and ties, and he supported her application to Starfleet Academy. Uhura shielded well, and all that was recorded on her psycho file was her high integrity profile and innate ability to command.

Slowly Uhura pulled the bridge crew into the aura of her sensuality. Kirk let her control, intrigued not challenged by her

power. Spock's eyebrows moved, but in answer to her unspoken request he lowered his barriers as he would sometimes for her, knowing a compassion and sensitivity that met his own, allowing contact but trusting her recognition of the differences between them.

"Anastasia, Anastasia, Weaver of Dreams, Holder of Nightmares, weave us together. Let us climb your ladder to the stars."

Scott trusted the lassie, and recognised the fey feeling, curiously holding it in his mind. Dr. McCoy responded in a way that mirrored both Kirk's and Spock's, letting her take control, trusting her. Sulu and Chekov were young enough, inexperienced enough, to be held in thrall by the fascination of a new sensation.

"Anastasia, Anastasia, bind us together, hold fast our dreams, take us to the stars."

They all felt the disorientation hold them, and in a rush the feeling of motion, of speed, light, colours. It was like entering a wormhole in space, but silent. Gradually their vision narrowed to a whirling pool of red light. Then came the sensation of their bodies catching up with them and passing through a barrier into a red tinted world.

Uhura blinked and stretched out. This time she was in a hexagonal enclosed area she instantly recognised as a spacecraft's bridge. She looked down as her vision cleared and had the distinct impression that a console grew to her thoughts. She looked up to the nearest viewscreen to see that they were moving at a slow impulse speed through a strange space.

Turning, she saw Captain Kirk rest his hands in a reflex action on the control panels on the arms of his command chair. Spock was bending over a panel labelled with strange characters reminiscent of Vulcan script. Opposite him, Scott was peering at an archaic-looking control panel with switch keys well spaced out, each with a written label. Dr. McCoy held a first aid kit, a survival medical kit and an advanced psychotricorder.

Spock spoke first. "Captain, are you all right?"

"Yes, Spock." Kirk glanced round to check them all then turned back to Spock. "Spock, report on our situation?"

"Unknown. Captain, I cannot decipher the coding for this computer immediately."

"Uhura?"

"I've a standard communications board but so far no response on any channel."

"Scott?"

"This craft seems to be powered by a nuclear pile, not warp drive. Captain, we won't be going far fast."

"Sulu?"

"Helm answering, so we have some control of this craft. This console has fine propellant spatial control for highest warp drive factors."

"Chekov?"

"Atomic chronometer and SINS navigation system. I can tell you where we are going in relation to where we have been, but not where we are. Keptin, we are going to have to use celestial navigation."

"Comment, Spock?"

Spock raised an eyebrow, but McCoy broke in.

"The question is not only where, but how."

"Precisely, Doctor."

Dr. McCoy continued, "Captain, what is your console like?"

"Same as the Enterprise. Why?"

"It appears that we have each contributed to the design of this spacecraft. Spock has a computer that is a challenge to him. You and Uhura have your standard consoles. Scotty has an engine he has always hankered to research and fly. Sulu has a flight control so fast and responsive he may not be able to handle it, Chekov the primitive navigation systems he has romanced about, and I..." He grimaced. "I have survival-type environmental controls and medical kit, and most advanced psychological feinberger."

Spock was the first to voice their comprehension. "Doctor, you are going to have to unravel our profiles and tie into my computer so we can project how to control this craft."

Captain Kirk absorbed the feel of the craft. The construction material was a flexible polymeric compo in hexagonal plates, and although all units were of a standard design the dimensions were not uniform. Spock did not have to stoop to his station, Uhura's feet touched the floor, Sulu and Chekov - both smaller than average - were not working at a stretch, and his command chair fitted. Individually, all dimensions expanded or contracted to accomodate them. Each had his or her own personal space. Dr. McCoy's was the largest area, Uhura and Scott had about the same space, Sulu and Chekov less. His space and Spock's merged. Odd. As they worked and sorted themselves out, the roughly hexagonal shape had firmed and stabilised.

Dr. McCoy's feinberger confirmed his innate knowledge of the crew. Scott's responses were identical with his normal readings. McCoy keyed a note to himself to research Scott's desire for more hands-on knowledge of nuclear powered craft. Uhura was reading more positive, more commanding, a result he had expected, for she was capable of command and ready to take it when necessary. Sulu's reading was above his norm: he was enjoying his sophisticated console. Chekov's reading was low: the results appeared shadowed, and McCoy frowned - he had been suspicious for some time that under stress Spock's Vulcan thought patterns bled to those attuned to his mind.

McCoy immediately chided himself for his xenophobia. *If Kirk or Scott or Uhura subconsciously broadcast their assumption of command role it's acceptable, but if Spock does the Vulcan equivalent you're suspicious of it.*

Chekov's readings were steadily rising. Kirk's were steady - he was relaxed, absorbed, waiting. Funny, Sulu's heightened reading was

not shadowing Kirk's. His nano wave was steady on a single source. Spock?

Spock's reading shocked McCoy, for all his reasoned interpretation of the situation. The Vulcan had subconsciously designed a computer he could not or would not operate.

A conditioned response curved McCoy's lips. *That, Doctor, was not logical.*

Spock seemed to be casting about, searching for something. The personal space occupied by Spock and Kirk contracted slightly. McCoy's brain raced into warp drive. Was this the key? Kirk was watching Spock speculatively. Once again an aura linked them. Spock was waiting for Kirk's response.

"Spock." Quietly commanding. "Report on data, please."

Spock sat like a satyr.

Captain Kirk's voice changed to the dangerous soft tone he used only rarely, and never to the Vulcan. "Commander, report data from your console."

McCoy came between the two, his feinberger clicking. Spock chose allegiance to Kirk before command and his natural Vulcan superiority of intellect. McCoy had often speculated how the two would respond if Spock were not so constrained.

Spock did not reply, but sat back with his arms folded in an almost Human gesture of defiance. The alien bridge changed shape, bulging to accomodate the personal space Spock was demanding. The others found the situation unbelievable. Scott's awed whisper reached them all.

"He looks like the devil himsel'!"

Kirk's body language reflected his shock, but amazingly his eyes held compassion for the Vulcan's predicament. He moved towards Spock, his hands outstretched, intending to touch, to demand contact between them.

Then the bridge disappeared.

It is not one of us that looks like the devil in paradise.

Spock had met their gaze blandly. He knew to what they were referring, and accepted the affectionate teasing, but behind his controlled Vulcan facade he was disturbed. How little did these Humans understand! So smug, so secure in their assumption that emotions, that pain and pleasure, were essential to life. He was repelled by their casual treatment of a stable and logical society, that they could without hesitation throw that society into the Human mode, that Jim dared to presume that emotions could cause that society to expand and grow. Logically, it could decline and fail; there was no guarantee that good would triumph over evil.

An inner voice queried, *What of Vulcan? Think of Human growth and achievement.*

No, that could not be his path. Unable to avoid the conflict in his mind, Spock faced the source of his disquiet - Jim.

The sound of the intercom was welcome.

"Spock," Dr. McCoy sounded, as usual, terse, "report to sickbay at once and let me dress your back and check you out."

"Doctor, I assure you I am in good health, and my back is causing only minor discomfort."

"Spock, I can't treat you at a distance, nor am I paying house calls, so come on, Mister."

"Spock, get down to sickbay now. Bones has just finished with me." Kirk was with McCoy.

"I will be with you in 5.3 minutes, Doctor."

Kirk frowned as he completed his report. He should have remembered to send Spock to sickbay before the end of his shift, but he had needed the reassurance of his presence. They had come so close today. Spock had taken those darts and saved his life, but at what cost? He would have to consider that later.

Hastily he signed his report and gave Sulu the con. He took the turbolift to his cabin, and peeling off his uniform stood under the shower, blanking his mind and luxuriating in cleaning himself as he waited for the flow of warm water to relax him. It didn't work. The niggles at the back of his mind would not wash away.

Inefficiently rubbing himself with a towel, he indentified the source of his disquiet. Spock. He shied from the personal problem and thought of work. He would have to discuss his report to Starfleet, and knew that Spock's devastatingly logical analysis of the situation and of his actions would make him squirm. Really, he had no delusions of godhood - it went with the job. Kirk dressed and decided to go to sickbay - a displacement activity, but he could do with McCoy's company.

Dr. McCoy looked up from the diagnostic bed where he was checking Spock.

Spock saw him and sat up. "Captain."

Again Kirk wished that interpreting the Vulcan was not a matter of instinct, subliminal signals, and guesswork. He had things to settle with Spock if he could pin him down.

Kirk moved to the bed and, unthinking, grabbed Spock's shoulders, holding him down. He felt Spock's withdrawal and moved his grip. Hell, he must be tired - he knew Spock did not like to be touched, and respected his wish. As he loosened his grip he felt Spock respond, moving into it, relaxing in his hold.

"Hold it there, Spock." McCoy spoke automatically as he came round the bed holding a spray. "Your back needs dressing."

Unsure if Spock's response was to himself or in answer to McCoy's admonition Kirk held on, giving physical support but not closing the contact. He clamped down on his responses. How easy it would be to pull Spock to him, let his hands slip down into a hug, bury his face in his friend's hair... and then maybe he would find the words to express his worries, his concern at Spock's actions and the depth of friendship they revealed.

Kirk looked down at the burn on Spock's back and his grip tightened. Spock turned slightly to give McCoy access and, unwilling to meet his eyes, Kirk pulled him closer.

"Right, Spock, I'm putting you on sicklist for the next 24 hours, and I want you back here for another check before you go back on duty."

Surprisingly, Spock did not resist, but commented, "'Rest would be welcome. Goodnight, Doctor, Captain."

Kirk turned to go to the turbolift with Spock, but McCoy's hand under his elbow stopped him.

"C'mon into my parlour, Jim."

He watched Kirk settle into the chair on the other side of his desk and poured the drinks.

"Spock's tough. That burn is already healing." He watched Kirk down the drink without tasting it. "Give, Jim."

"What?"

"Something's bothering you, more than the usual post-action depression."

"Uh."

"Are you going to tell me, or am I going to have to guess?"

"Bones, I haven't had time to think, to consider..." Uncharacteristically, Kirk hesitated.

"Okay, we'll do it the hard way. You feel guilt because you were distracted by that Garden of Eden, because you related to a personal preconception - didn't we all? - rather than the situation. You knew we were all a little space-happy, and you are responsible, but mistakes go with command. You have already faced the consequences of that slip and learned from the operation.

"Then your First Officer proved he would give his life for you. That you found disturbing, but the knowledge is not new to you, for it is something that goes with the job and a Vulcan second-in-command, and you have to deal with it on your own terms.

"Then you had a command disagreement with Spock. Okay, it's not the first time, but the nature of this one is bothering you. It's too close to your problem."

"Problem?"

"You and Spock. It was emotion which made him take those darts for you, and just now he damn nearly responded to you, and you to him. There's nothing wrong in that, except that you both held back from accepting mutual comfort. I've watched you both these last few months, and you need to define your relationship before it tears both of you apart."

"Bones, how?"

"You are the only one he allows close. If this has hit you like this... Use your imagination, Jim. Go and reassure him now, before he retreats behind Vulcan again."

Kirk finished his drink and got up. McCoy watched him go, for once uncertain if he had done the right thing. He shrugged and poured another drink. He had to judge the situation, for he was responsible for the mental health of the Captain and First Officer.

Kirk stood just inside the door of Spock's cabin. "Spock?" His voice faltered as he realised Spock had been sleeping. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I..." He moved to the bed, echoing his movements in sickbay. "I had to see you and thank you, my friend."

Dark eyes turned to him, but he couldn't read them. "Thanks are illogical between friends."

Suddenly words were not important. Their friendship was openly admitted for the first time.

Kirk gripped Spock's shoulder, finishing the gesture born in sickbay with a brief hug, and eased him back onto the pillow. "Sleep now."

An eyebrow rose as the Vulcan deadpanned, "I will if you let me."

Kirk smiled and left. McCoy was wrong. Their friendship was right - for both of them.

Kirk held Spock's gaze, unheeding of the curious looks of the others, as they reformed. The tenseness left Spock's back and he began to work the controls of his console. McCoy continued recording on his feinberger, though he knew he would make nothing of the readings.

Uhura broke the silence. "Captain, I'm getting something." Her eyes widened as she amplified and broadcast the signal.

"Mission Control Houston."

Scott reacted instantly. "Try for an indirect remote source, lass - it's maybe from a satellite."

"I can find no power trace."

"They used solar power and batteries in those days."

Uhura concentrated on her board.

Kirk broke the silence. "Uhura, find the source of that transmission."

"Captain, I have it."

"Chekov, lock onto the source."

Uhura gave him the coordinates.

"Chekov?"

"Keptin, we have found a solar system. The parameters would fit the Sol system."

Automatically Kirk turned to the Vulcan. "Correlation, Spock?"

Spock had been working a number of functions on his computer with increasing confidence. "Sensors indicate a sail/cell form of solar-powered alloy satellite, communications function, of late 20th

century Terran style, aligned to Sol source. This, with the distinctive formation of the solar system, gives a 98.482 probability of Sol system. Calculation of sail movement over the past 4.234 minutes indicates our position as 3.4 light years from Uranus on heading 240 mark 4."

Chekov's excited voice broke in, "I can navigate us back now, Captain."

Sotto voce, Sulu commented, "So, I hope, could any raw Academy recruit."

Scott was watching Uhura. "Well done, lassie. Tell me, was it a homing instinct that brought us here?"

"If it was, Scotty, I don't feel it now."

"Nae, lass, we're back to Captain Kirk now, think on."

Dr. McCoy broke in, impatient as usual. "Right, so now we know where we are, but has anyone any ideas as to *when* we are?"

"Doctor, I congratulate you on your logic."

"You trying to insult me, Spock?"

"No, I feel."

"We-el, I never thought to hear it. Yes, Spock, you feel."

"Doctor, I am here, but I am unable to be Vulcan."

"Spock?" Kirk broke in. Not only were the Doctor's and First Officer's roles reversed, but he had never known Spock to be anything but meticulous in his speech. Then he realised. "You are with us, but at this time we had not met Vulcans."

"Exactly. The Vulcan in me is recessive."

Dr. McCoy quickly recalibrated his feinberger and scanned Spock. "I've often wondered what the Human in you is like, Spock."

"Bones, hang on a minute." Quietly, Kirk approached Spock. "Spock, I believe we shared a memory just before Uhura picked up that signal - was that response the Human in you?"

The hurt was obvious in Kirk's stance. Intellectually he had suspected it was the Human Spock who was his friend, but because he had always accepted Spock as he was he had hoped that it was Spock, neither Vulcan nor Human, who responded to him.

Spock looked down at his feet. At last he raised his eyes to Kirk. He could not hide from this man. "No, you are right. It is the Vulcan in me who is your friend also."

Their glances held as a memory surfaced. Nomad. A Terran space probe of 8/2002. Its mission, to seek out alien life forms. It was damaged by meteorites, and met an alien probe, the Tan Ru. Tan Ru's mission was to secure soil samples and sterilise them. Nomad combined fragments of both their programmes in its automaic repair. It had wiped out 4 million inhabitants of the Malurian system, seeking to sterilise all life forms, before it met the Enterprise and James T.

Kirk, who it mistook for its creator, Jackson Roykirk.

In a desperate attempt to unscramble the probe's programming, Spock entered a mind meld with it. His control of a meld being always precarious, Kirk had monitored his progress. When Spock appeared distressed Kirk had broken the meld, pulling him away and bundling him out of the briefing room and across the corridor until they had come to rest by a bulkhead. For a few moments Spock held on to him for support, for reassurance, then, his control re-established, he had drawn away.

His mind on the problem of Nomad, Kirk had filed the Vulcan's response to be considered later. Spock had explained what he had discovered about Nomad, and Kirk had convinced the probe that as the form which had created Nomad was imperfect, Nomad was therefore inherently imperfect. Spock reflected later on the illogic of that premise, but while Nomad was busy with the concept Scott had beamed it into deep space and destroyed it. Spock had quietly excused himself and Kirk had let him go, knowing the strain a meld imposed on the Vulcan and allowing him time for meditation.

It was much later in the ship's night, in the early hours of the morning, when Kirk's subconscious woke him. He had a feeling that Spock was much more distressed after the meld than Kirk had ever seen him.

Heck, Jim, how do you know that? Spock would never admit it. But, his conscience argued, you did see not only that he was hurt, but that he wanted reassurance from you. What Spock wants is time to meditate, not for you to hold his hand. And besides, he won't want to be disturbed while he's meditating, and have you ever known Spock to want help with his problems? What makes you so sure he has them?

Kirk tried to sort out his chaotic thoughts and find reasons for his unease. True, Spock had not ever asked for help; but neither had he, yet when he had wanted help Spock was there, comforting by his presence without the need for words.

Kirk held on to that. Spock was an alien, and words were not the only way to make contact. And hell, he could accept a rebuff...

Knowing his decision was made Kirk got up and dressed. Outside Spock's cabin he hesitated, then buzzed for permission to enter. There was no reply. Kirk paused. Somehow, in the dimly lit corridor, his fears seemed nebulous, but he squared his shoulders and used the command override. If Spock was meditating he would meet the inevitable raised eyebrow, say he needed reassurance, and go. If Spock was sleeping, he need never know.

The cold light of the corridor cut a swathe through the office/living quarters. The door closed, leaving Spock's cabin bathed in the red glow of the firepot. Spock was lying on the bunk, awake. Unable to meet the pain he had glimpsed in the dark eyes, Kirk moved to kneel by his side.

"Spock?"

"Captain. What is it you require?"

"Er, Spock..." For a moment Kirk struggled with words and an instinctive response to pull the Vulcan close and soothe with touch. "I... Oh hell, I've been uneasy about the effect of the meld with Nomad on you." In a rush he blurted, "Look, can I get Bones to look you over?"

"No. I do not require Dr. McCoy's services."

"But you're hurt. Spock, please, can't you tell me what's wrong?"

"I need rest, Captain, that is all."

"But you can't rest at the moment, can you, my friend?" Gently Kirk laid his hand on the tense shoulder. "Humans can get into a state of overtiredness when they can't relax enough to get to sleep." He followed the thought through, knowing that even if he hurt Spock he would have to make the next question a command. "Have you meditated since the meld with Nomad?"

"No, Captain."

"Why not?"

"Captain, I am Vulcan. I will not answer personal questions. You are presuming..."

All Kirk's worries were confirmed. "Spock, will you let me help?"

Kirk grabbed both Spock's shoulders and shook him in his frustration at not knowing how to get through. As he did so he noticed the tears of agony spill from the corners of Spock's eyes and flow down his cheeks and into the pillow. He pulled Spock against him, pushing the Vulcan's head onto his shoulder.

"All right, Spock, let's consider what I do know. When I grabbed you from the meld with Nomad I got the impression you were hurt and needed reassurance. I know you don't want physical reassurance, and holding you like this won't work, but I felt your need. You cannot compose yourself for meditation, and we have no Vulcans aboard to help you with mental contact. I know it's difficult for you, but will you try to let me help you?"

Gently he stroked the Vulcan's head and felt him relax a little. He wasn't sure Spock would answer him, and heaven knew how many taboos he'd breached.

After a time Spock lifted his head. His voice was strangled. "Jim, it is not logical to refuse help when it is needed, but I am afraid. My control of the meld is uncertain, and I do not want to harm you, but I need a light link to focus my mind before I can commence healing."

"Spock, I trust you. It is me you will meld with, and we have been linked before. I want to help, and I don't believe you would harm me."

"Jim, would it bother you if Dr. McCoy was present? He could break the meld if you became distressed."

"No. I would have suggested it, but I know how you need privacy. Do you want me to get Bones and explain to him?" He felt Spock nod. "Will you be okay while I get him?"

Spock nodded again. Gently Spock laid him back on the bunk, turning the damp pillow. He looked back on his way out, and saw Spock's teeth bite into his lower lip.

Dr. McCoy woke immediately and automatically opened the door in response to the buzzer. He was in his robe as Kirk entered. "Jim! What's the matter?"

"Bones, it's Spock. He needs to link minds with me, and we would like you to monitor the meld for me."

"Jim, I want an explanation."

"You know he melded with Nomad in the briefing room?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I had to break the contact. You know how Spock can get so involved he gets lost? Remember the Horta?"

"Yeah."

"This time he seemed more distressed, and was very withdrawn, very Vulcan afterwards, and when he asked for time to meditate I let him off duty."

"And?" Dr. McCoy prompted.

"Bones, I couldn't sleep, so I went to check on him."

Dr. McCoy let that pass for the moment.

"Did you realise Vulcans can need the touch of minds, as we need physical contact, to reorientate themselves?"

"Yes, but Spock is a hybrid, and not a strong telepath... Oh, I see." His brain woke completely and he responded to the emergency, letting Kirk off the hook. "You are the closest to him, and he needs comforting."

There is was, bluntly spoken between them. Kirk heard the understanding, and the acceptance.

"Yes."

"Go back to him. I'll be along in a minute."

On his way to Spock's cabin Dr. McCoy examined his intuitive feelings. He was not surprised this had happened, given the rapport between Spock and Kirk, and his growing suspicion that Spock, like all Vulcans, craved some kind of contact with a like mind, and that Kirk was the key to unlocking that need in Spock. He felt honoured by their trust in him.

Spock's cabin opened to his medical override. Kirk was sitting in a chair drawn close to Spock's bunk. Dr. McCoy waved the lights to dim level. The firepot's glow was fine, but he needed to see.

"Bones?"

Dr. McCoy crossed over and touched Kirk's shoulder. "Spock, Jim, I'm here and I'll watch you both, but I won't interfere unless either of you gets distressed, understand?"

"Yes, Doctor. Thank you."

He moved away, giving them privacy to establish a meld. As he turned Kirk's hand moved to the meld points on Spock's face. Odd, when as a non-telepath he could not initiate contact. McCoy watched Spock, seeing the Vulcan's face gradually relax. He moved, turning to watch Kirk. The Human's eyes were closed, but his whole attitude spoke of caring, of compassion and tenderness for the Vulcan.

Spock moved slightly, his features unmasked in the meld showing fear and horror. Kirk's face moved in response, and he whispered something too low for McCoy to catch and tightened his fingers against Spock's face. Spock moved into the grip of the fingers and gradually relaxed.

As McCoy watched the meld became closer, deeper. He could sense the control in the tense set of Kirk's shoulders, and watched in amazement as Spock relaxed against him. Kirk began a rhythmic murmuring that was almost hypnotic, and although sweat was beading his forehead McCoy left him to it, for he could see that Spock was on the verge of a natural sleep. He moved forward until he could touch Kirk, watching Spock all the time.

"He's asleep now, Jim," he whispered, tapping Kirk's shoulder.

Kirk nodded, eased his fingers from Spock's face, and lifted Spock's hands from his own. He sat for a moment holding the Vulcan's hands, then gently laid them on the bunk. Dr. McCoy wiped the sweat from his face as he seemed unwilling to let Spock's hands go.

"Will you be all right now, Jim?"

"Yes, but I'll stay until he wakes."

"I'll leave you then, but buzz if you need anything." He met Kirk's eyes without hesitation, smiled back, and left, wiping the tears from his own eyes.

Dr. McCoy blinked the tears from his eyes. He must have been staring too hard at the feinberger readout. Spock was recovering. The readout had climbed to 85% and rising. He tuned to Kirk. His reading was approaching 92%. Good.

Dr. McCoy turned his thoughts inward, searching his own feelings. He was well rated empath, and he could feel the alien ship gathering itself. Scott and Sulu were conferring, transposing data and controls on their consoles. Spock was checking the results and confirming settings. Kirk was there on cue as Spock initiated the bridge crew's reports.

"Captain, we are able to move her."

Scott's, "Power will be basic, but to speeds ye only hae dreamed of."

Sulu's, "I have manoeuverability and helm control."

Chekov's, "Navigation systems, spatial and temporal, ready to compute."

Uhura's, "Listening watch set for main communication frequencies."

"Captain, I compute a 3.92 probability of reaching back to the Enterprise's Rim World."

"And if we stay here?"

Spock shrugged before he could control the response.

"Okay, let's go."

Scott's concentration increased as he set the engines to Spock's calculations. A strange roaring noise and vibration shook the ship, the sounds felt rather than heard, jarring their bodies and touching the edge of consciousness; then, with an indescribable feeling, they were moving in the most fantastic way possible - a true sensation of flying in free flight.

Captain Kirk revelled in the exhilarating sensation. He looked at McCoy, who was busy with his feinberger, scrapping his notes on Scott's obsession with outmoded methods of propulsion - this was sheer joy.

Surprised by his response, McCoy muttered, "Freud has nothing on McCoy - flying the oldest sex dream of all!"

Kirk held eye contact with Spock, enjoying the shared response. Maybe again the Enterprise crew would beat the odds. McCoy's comment took him back to where this had started, but he was still in contact with Spock, and unbidden a memory sparked between them.

Hot reds, burning, combat pulling at muscles, stimulating him until his lust was slaked by the feel of the body of his Captain, limp, submissive to him. Relief and realisation hit him - he had killed his Captain... and his friend.

Somehow he managed to contain himself, control until the privacy of the turbolift; control again until he heard Jim and faced him. Sensing the fragile nature of his control the Captain had hustled him away from McCoy's penetrating stare to 'go and mind the store'. Captain Kirk checked the Enterprise's status and ordered them both off duty. Spock entered his cabin and settled himself in the meditation alcove.

Kirk showered, then answered the door to let Dr. McCoy in. The doctor fussed around Kirk, reapplying the spray dressing on his chest and opening a bottle of Saurian brandy.

"Drink, Jim." It was a command, not a question.

"Please, Bones."

"Jim..."

"Bones, are you going to check Spock?"

"Who's the doctor around here? You and I have to talk first. I don't imagine I'll be welcome next door at the moment. It's okay, Jim. Spock's probably meditating just now. It's you the shock of this is going to hit - and soon."

McCoy watched Kirk fidget, then get up and restlessly pace the cabin. He sat and waited, not underrating Kirk's intelligence, instincts and ability.

"Bones, Spock asked us to go and stand with him as his friends. Why?"

"You tell me, Jim."

A darting look, and the pacing continued.

"He didn't want to go alone to this most Vulcan ceremony. He... *needed* us."

Kirk's eyes widened, his body language spoke eloquently of his horror as he followed through the implications of his statement. "Bones, he said you had guessed what was wrong, but had kept your own counsel. You told me you didn't know what was wrong with him, but that we needed to get him to Vulcan or he would die. Bones, you *knew* about pon far. You must have known about pon far."

"I did, Jim."

"I had to command Spock to tell me about pon far, and I can't believe it. How can such a logical, advanced, superior race have a mating time like salmon, when a male must return home and take a mate, or die?"

"Jim, what makes you think there is anything primitive about being called back to the place of your birth to reproduce?"

"But Spock was so reluctant. He fought it - he didn't find it logical. He told me that, probably due to the suppression of emotion at all other times, the pressures of pon far at its height lead Vulcan males to frenzy and madness."

Apparently onto another tack, Kirk continued, "T'Pau asked him, 'Are you Human or Vulcan?' How could she be so cruel?"

Dr. McCoy watched as Kirk's doubts surfaced.

"Bones, it is all over now, isn't it? Spock is all right? This challenge..." Bewildered eyes met McCoy's. "This fight we had... It's broken the cycle?"

"So Spock says."

"It has broken the bond with T'Pring?"

"Apparently."

Bones, where does that leave Spock? Unbonded, unmated and free from Vulcan ties - alone." Kirk's eyes narrowed - for once he was at a loss. "I don't understand. Why didn't you tell me he was in pon far?"

Dr. McCoy was too good a psychologist to lose ground. "Think about it, Jim. I'm going to pay a house call on Spock now."

Dr. McCoy slowly walked the few feet to Spock's quarters. He was uncertain, unsure if he had gone far enough to push Kirk in the right direction, but knowing that Kirk must reach a conclusion on his own for all their sakes.

Not for the first time he wished he could transcend his own nature and bridge the gulf between himself and Spock. They both cared - how they cared - but the Human, emotional, heartrending tactile comfort he could offer Spock was that what the Vulcan could not accept. Not yet. Given time and growth, maybe. Gathering his professional mantle about him in a manner curiously mirroring Spock's Vulcan control, Dr. McCoy buzzed the door entry.

"Who is it?"

"Dr. McCoy making a house call."

"I do not require your services."

"Suit yourself, Spock. I'm coming in." He used the medical override.

Spock was sitting at his desk, working. "Dr. McCoy."

"Spock."

Unaccountably, McCoy felt tears threaten. He came round to Spock's side of the desk and sat on it, facing the Vulcan. He saw Spock recoil at the physical closeness.

"Spock, I'm too damn tired and you're too damn exhausted to fight. I'll say what I'm going to, then you get into bed, understand?"

"Doctor, I am a Vulcan..."

"Dammit, Spock, shut up. I'm only going to say this once. Today I was honoured to be called your friend. Well, my friend, just once let's cut out the pretence. Into bed with you."

Spock retreated as McCoy advanced on him, defensively settling himself on the bed, composing himself for the distracting noise of the doctor's scanner. He opened his eyes to see McCoy bending over him, his fingers extended in the Vulcan

greeting.

"Spock, my friend, grant me this."

Desperately needing the contact offered, Spock's defences were breached. He closed his eyes and met McCoy's touch the Vulcan way, inside of fingers to inside of fingers.

McCoy felt Spock delicately break the contact and relax back onto the pillows. He turned and left without looking at Spock, but knowing that their friendship was sealed.

Captain Kirk paced his cabin, his mind seething with half formed ideas. He knew he would not rest until he had talked things over with Spock, but was reluctant to disturb him, having seen his exhaustion - having checked his chronometer - a couple of hours ago.

If you feel like this, how do you think Spock feels?

His mind recalled other times he had seen Spock's defences down, and then he knew what McCoy was getting at. Could Spock's pon far have been a self-induced reaction to his situation, and not the Vulcan biological need? Kirk's thoughts raced as he went to Spock's cabin. Yes, that explanation would fit...

"Come."

Spock's face was turned to him, but for once he did not try to get up.

Kirk went and sat on the edge of the bunk, facing him, waiting. Wordlessly he opened his arms, unsure of how to make the next move. He watched Spock huddle away, pulling his knees up and hiding his face in his hands. Sympathetically, Kirk watched him struggle for control.

"Don't, Spock. It's okay. Give in. Believe me, you'll feel better afterwards."

"Cannot. I am Vulcan. I must control."

"Oh, no. Not at the moment, my Vulcan friend. Shall I tell you, this has been building up for a while, hasn't it? First you have learned how to reach out and touch the Human way. It is strange, the seduction of touch. Then you learned to reach out the Vulcan way, to touch the thoughts and thought processes of others. And you have felt friendship the Human way.

"Oh Spock, I do understand. Parted and never parted, never and always touching and touched, my friend, you are not alone. Accept and reach out, search and you will find, give and you will be given. The Human way is not so very different." Kirk managed to pull Spock close to him, hiding his tear-streaked face in the Vulcan's hair.

Spock lay passive in his arms, unable to respond, unsure what was expected of him. If it was Dr. McCoy he would have drawn away and kept control, but this was Jim, and he trusted him not to ask for what he could not give.

Jim had indicated that he should cry... Jim was crying...

Convulsively Spock's fingers grasped at Kirk's shirt as his chest heaved spasmodically, but he could not find release. Spock stilled his fingers as they found the layer of plastiskin over the lirpa cut. He carefully traced the line of the wound. Kirk held his breath. Spock drew back and raised his head. His eyes met Kirk's, to find understanding. Spock sighed and nestled back into Kirk's arms,

the healing tears running down his face.

Much later he felt Kirk reach out and wipe his face. Gratefully he accepted the tissues offered. Seeing Spock's control returning, Kirk eased himself away and got them a warm drink.

"Better?"

"Yes. I apologise."

"Don't. I should have realised the strains we were forcing on you. Spock, this breaking of the bond - it is of your choice?"

"My childhood bond with T'Pring went deep, but it needed to be broken for we are not compatible, and I do not seek marriage the Vulcan way." Spock shuddered. "I hoped my Human half... Jim, I cannot impose my needs on you."

"Spock, I impose my needs on you. Don't worry." Kirk met the quirked eyebrow. No, it was not logical to worry or try to alter one's nature. He smiled, gently teasing Spock. "IDIC?"

"IDIC."

Kirk took the empty cup. "Will you be able to sleep now?"

Spock nodded and let peace steal over him. Surprisingly, his barriers were intact; he felt only cleansed, healed from the tug in his mind of T'Pring's presence and threat, and free to follow his own path. He was still Vulcan, but tied to Vulcan by his own choice.

Kirk watched until he was sure that Spock was sleeping, then quietly left him.

Scott's exultant cries brought them back. "Captain, it's a bonny machine. We can drive through space, or warp space and time."

Uhura broke into their contemplations. "Captain, visual on critical path now."

"Keptin, Rim World barrier in 3.2 minutes."

"Uhura, Chekov, well done."

Spock and Sulu were conferring. Spock calculated on the computer as Sulu fed him a stream of readings. Captain Kirk watched the schematics of their approach through space and time.

Spock directed, "Mr. Scott, disengage warp drive in 5 seconds beginning - now."

All eyes were on the schematic three dimensional plot guiding them back to the Enterprise. The theoretical and real paths were merging. They felt the loss of speed smoothly, like gliding in.

"Transferring to space drive now."

A blunting of perceptions, then the familiar feel of space speed.

Chekov cried the warning. "Keptin!!

Sulu had his head down and was working frantically at the helm. Spock moved over to help him. Captain Kirk's eyes were on the visual display. Space winds had caught the small vessel in their transition and they were diverging from the ideal plot for re-entry.

"Starboard thrusters 303 degrees, 2.367 burst."

The ship keeled, changing shape as it was caught by the thrust.

"Forward port thrusters, 0.07 degrees, 0.2 second burst."

The lines of projected and actual course steadied and converged. Captain Kirk felt a prickle of disquiet, as if there was something he had overlooked.

"Activate shields and visors."

"Scott, Sulu, monitor configuration change stresses as we go through the barrier."

The craft distorted and Kirk projected shape changes for Spock to compute and give to Sulu as thrust groupings to hold his projected configuration. Scott coped smoothly with the power fluctuations. The form of the vessel changed from hexagon to cone and back again. It worked, the bridge crew working as a team to guide the vessel back. It was the most exhilarating ride they had ever experienced.

"Captain!" The joy in Uhura's voice was unmistakable. She broadcast the signal she was receiving.

As each recognised the signature of the Enterprise they found themselves slightly disorientated, but at their own posts on the Enterprise bridge.

Spock watched Captain Kirk turn to him. "Ship has just been probed by alien sensors, Captain."

Uhura reported, "Warning buoy, off-limits Rim World barrier ahead."

"Slow to warp factor one. Chekov, plot course to clear the off-limits system. Spock, any data on the prohibition?"

"Off-limits since the Organian Treaty. Previous history classified, but nature of reports indicates time/spatial and psychic distortions."

Well, the first interesting contact in weeks of star charting, and it was forbidden. Kirk let the disappointment fade. He returned to star charting and his daydreams, trying to recapture that feeling of anticipation. Where was he? Thought guidance and the sexual connotation. Down, boy - that wasn't anything new. It was a pity he couldn't remember that flash of inspiration. It hovered... The homing instinct?

No, for him and his crew the Enterprise was home. Still, if he let himself drift no doubt - like the boredom of star charting - it would return.

Through the barrier on the Rim World their response to the probe was eagerly studied. The results were the most promising so far - soon they might be ready for contact, the alien mused.

Emotional striving, acceptance of self. My children, there is hope and potential for growth, but how limited you are, how ruled by your own perceptions. How far you still have to go...



Just Sentence

It is a fitting reward
for your attempted takeover
of the Enterprise, Harry Mudd -
that you should get the android
which you have constructed...
with only a few slight alterations.
Norman and his companions
are now defeated, leaving us
as Starship officers, to consider
an appropriate sentence for you.
We see the pleasure you get
from turning off your Stella replica
by mere verbal command,
and so consider it just
that you should keep her.
But to further enlarge this gift
why not increase her number,
making 500 like the original?
For what better guardians could exist
to keep you in line?
But with *these* Stellas
you will not be able to shut them off.
They will be forever functioning,
correcting, ordering,
and controlling your life,
until any other alternative would be
an improvement in your eyes.
So think again, before you try
to put one over this Enterprise crew,
for when we're victorious we will always
determine a most fair
and just sentence.

CarolMel Ambassador



IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT

by

Brenda Kelsey

To say that Montgomery Scott was annoyed was roughly equivalent to saying that his beloved bairns would cause a minor explosion; should anyone ever be rash enough to decide that they should. He prowled around the small room again while the Chasaka sat on the floor and watched him. The Chasaka, despite topping him by a full metre and outmassing him by at least fifty kilos, was, in fact, scared silly by the smaller Human. The Chasaka could be excused her reaction; she was after all still very young in the terms of her race, barely adolescent in fact, and she and her friends had daringly managed to plan and execute a kidnapping; the first ever accomplished on their planet.

Scott shivered, looked at the Providash, looked at Spock and said, "Let's use the power sledge. That's what we're supposed tae do."

The twinkle in Spock's eye could have been a reflection on the lens of his protective goggles, but Scott doubted it. "The Rancher has provided transport for us, and as she is reported to have the best examples of Providash, then these are in all probability some of them. To refuse to ride them would be a grave insult."

Scott eyed the mountain of hair pawing at the flag-stones in search of fodder. "Why does it seem tae me that I've seen beasties like that before?"

"They do bear a superficial resemblance to the Ovibos Moschatus."

Scott looked at him patiently.

"Musk ox," supplied Spock.

"Oh, aye. - Do we really have tae??"

Spock responded with something close to a sigh. "I can perceive no other course of action which is commensurate with our duties."

"Bones willna like it," warned Scott.

"I admit to being something less than totally enthusiastic myself. However..."

"Och, it's jist that I havnae ridden anything for years."

"The seating arrangements are more than adequate and are complete with a safety strap." Spock began to leave the shelter of the stable. "All you will have to contend with is the motion sickness."

"What!!!"

Scott held his laughter in until Spock had left, then succumbed to the fit. What in the Vulcan passed as a sense of humour was unpredictable and manifested itself at the wildest moments. It had taken him several years to recognise that the Vulcan did understand humour, and had learned to employ it to lessen the tension on the Bridge in tight situations, all strictly in the line of duty. He wondered what the Chief Medical Officer made of Spock in one of his funning moods - after all, Spock was able to maintain the straightest face in the most outrageous circumstances. How were you to *know* when he was joking?

Scott thought of the journey ahead and fervently hoped that the Vulcan was joking this time. He went outside, bracing himself for the force of the wind, and staggered only slightly as the powerful gusts plucked at him. Spock, his survival suit gleaming bright orange in the gloom of the courtyard, was standing in the shelter of the saddled Providash, talking to a group of Chasaka. Scott waded across the courtyard to join them, the new fall of snow crunching under his thickly booted feet where it had yet to be cleared away.

"Warmth to you, Officer Scott," boomed the Rancher formally.

"May your hearth never be cold," responded Scott with the second line of the traditional welcome.

"I have selected for you to ride two of the ranch's finest beasts. They are very gentle and tame, but as you are both unused to the ordering of their ways, will you consent to the use of leading reins?" The universal translator gave the voice a mixture of regret and pride.

Scott resisted the temptation to look at Spock as he replied, "The offer is most gratefully accepted. We were concerned that we might cause injury to your animals through our inexperience with them."

Scott eyed the Providash nearest him. A healthy three metres tall and all of four point five metres long, in his opinion nothing less than a sledge hammer wielded by a giant would cause the animal even to pay attention to the surrounding bipeds; even if all but two of them cleared two metres themselves. He envied Spock his control as the Rancher solemnly began pointing out the finer points of the massive animal, though how anyone could spot *any* points, good or bad, under all that hair was beyond him.

He cursed McCoy slightly, in an absent-minded sort of way, as he tried to absorb the points to look for that denoted a prime Providash. The Doctor was absolutely correct in saying that the Vulcan should not travel about this world without a companion, but because Sulu was so deeply involved with the Providash horticulturists, and McCoy equally so with the Providash Healers, that meant that the lot had fallen to him. The discussion - it could only be called an argument on McCoy's part - about the necessity for Scott to leave his engineering investigations to travel with Spock to the Providash farm had lasted an entertaining mealtime long. It had resulted in a victory for McCoy, and Spock had withdrawn from the Fireside group to write up his day's endeavours. McCoy, sitting by the fire, had muttered on like a forgotten Greek chorus. Sulu had stuck it for maybe eight minutes, then he had given up and wandered away to look over Spock's shoulder. Scott had been left to soothe McCoy. He wished he dared do it with a swift kick to the shins, but

wisdom decreed otherwise.

"Why sae peeved? I'm the one who's goin' tae go tae the ranch wi' him. Whit good is a ranch tae me?"

"What good is a ranch to *him*?" shot back McCoy.

"He was invited."

"Yeah. Invite a confirmed vegetarian to go look around an establishment devoted to the raising of *meat*."

"Och, weel - "

"There's nothing *weel* about this trip. It's wrong. This super-refrigerated iceball is a slice of frozen hell and the people here are..."

"Strange? Aye, I'll agree wi' that. There are some mighty peculiar anomalies in their engineering skills," Scott said thoughtfully.

"Do tell." The sarcasm was heavy and very obvious.

"They're so damned obvious ye tend tae miss 'em," teased Scott.

McCoy glanced across to where Sulu had drawn Spock into a discussion of crop rotation - at least, that was what it sounded like.

"For instance?" he prompted.

"This complex."

McCoy looked round the room that served as their quarters. It was fully ten metres long and fifteen wide, with doors made of cunningly balanced rock slabs that led to sleeping chambers and a relief station. He looked blankly at Scott.

"Nice wee place," said Scott. "Solid rock walls. Ye noticed the walls, did ye?"

"How could you miss them? They must be four or five metres thick in some places."

"True enough. And ye'll have also noticed that the complex is partly built underground?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did ye no wonder why?"

"Aye, and I asked," said McCoy sweetly.

"Did ye now? And what answer did ye get?"

"That it was found that a complex could be heated more effectively if it was built partly below ground level," quoted McCoy.

Scott looked at him, leaned an arm on the back of McCoy's chair, and asked, "And did it nae occur tae ye tae wonder just how they came tae reach that conclusion? What methods they used? What instruments for measuring the savings involved? What other methods they tried?"

McCoy opened his mouth, then left it open as the idea and the associated problems began reeling through his mind. Eyes narrowing, he glanced suspiciously at Spock's back, then back at Scott.

"Aye," drawled the engineer. "And how did they manage to dig out the foundations? Remember, mind, that this is one of the smaller complexes. And how did they cut and shift the blocks of stone?"

McCoy's eyes flicked to the stone surround of the fireplace. "Rollers?" he offered cautiously.

"How do ye make rollers, Bones?"

"You would use tree trunks."

"Like this one, perhaps?" Scott knocked on the over-large table behind them.

"That's stone."

"No. It's wood. Artificially fossilised wood. Less than 1800 years ago, that table top was a tree."

"1800? But this ice age..." His voice trailed away. "There are some intriguing gaps on the medical side, too. Their knowledge is too good in some areas, and non-existent in others."

"Sulu mentioned the table to Spock. What do you think our eternally curious Science Officer replied?"

McCoy shook his head.

"'Put it in your report, Mr. Sulu'."

"Ouch," said McCoy.

"Exactly. Yon Chasaka have no technology, and I include design, mathematics, physical equipment, that could handle the quarrying of blocks this large." He waved a hand at the walls. "Oh, they can manage the smaller ones fine, but no' anything that size. And another thing. The walls on the lower floors. They are solid rock, left in place as the foundations were dug out around them."

McCoy's brows creased. "Why? How?"

"It's ma guess that we're here tae get answers tae questions like that, and anything else we can find out in the process."

"Tomorrow, while you're gone, I'm going to have a closer look at one of those Providash," said McCoy suddenly, several clues popping into place.

"Would you care tae go wi' Spock?" Scott offered a trifle too eagerly.

"Er, no thanks, Scotty. I'm sure you'll find it... enthralling."

Scott looked at the stirrup. The top was at eye level for him. He looked at the mounting block and compared the distance with his athletic skills as a gymnast. Distance won. Spock had already

reached the same conclusion and was explaining the problem to the Rancher, Mist-Floating-over-Ice. Mist-Floating looked down at Spock, did the Chasaka equivalent of grinning comprehension and folded her hands together. Spock stepped lightly on and was tossed easily upwards. He landed across the padded saddle, then twisted around to sit astride the Providash. Mist-Floating shortened the stirrups for him. Scott gritted his teeth and in his turn flew upwards.

As they were led out of the courtyard, the full force of the wind lashed into them, buffeting them against the deep padding. Scott checked the security strap, then his suit monitor, then he turned his tricorder on Spock and checked his suit's performance. Spock affected not to notice Scott's activity. Scott didn't mind in the least and continued his checks every fifteen minutes, alert for the least sign that the snug environment created within the suit's bright casing was failing.

Although the temperature was only about -20, the wind chill factor doubled it with ease. Scott knew that he would survive only a few hours if the power pack on his suit, which supplied heat and maintained a dry, comfortable, internal climate, failed. The insulation on the suit would protect him for that long without power. Spock, with his desert-world heritage to disperse rather than retain heat, would succumb very much more quickly.

Scott pretended to admire the scenery which was at the same time spectacular and monotonous. Too much snow was wearing on the eyes, and a look at the heaving clouds hurtling along above him startled him. The clouds, which ranged in colour from dark sage green to a darker bilious indigo, looked pregnant with the possibilities of snow. Scott eased his muscles for what seemed the two hundredth time and checked the power levels again.

As he slipped the tricorder back into the saddle pack, he realised just how long they had been riding. The pace was gentle, and they had been shown some interesting features of the landscape, but the ride had lasted for three hours already, almost a third of the Chasaka daylight period. At this rate they'd have little time to look over the ranch before they'd have to start back to the complex in enough time to reach it before the start of the longer and even colder night period.

"Mist-Floating," Scott called. "How much further to your ranch? The day's a third past already."

The Chasaka reined in, bringing the cavalcade to an untidy halt. Mist-Floating yelled, "Take them now!" and strong arms swept him from his perch, snapping the safety strap like softened butter. He was held kicking and struggling in an intelligent bear-hug.

"Spock!!" His cry served to trigger Spock's lunge into the saddle packs to try to retrieve the comms booster pack to alert McCoy and Sulu to the danger they were now facing. One of the Chasaka launched himself from his mount and hit Spock in a broadside tackle which sent them both flying through the air to land in a snowdrift. To Scott's horror, Spock was underneath, and he stayed ominously still when the Chasaka youth rose from the snow.

"You!!!!!!" Scott's language descended into invective. "Let me go!" The Chasaka complied and Scott thudded to the ground. He scrambled upright to go to Spock and was knocked flat again, and pinned as hands tugged at belt pouches and, to his anger, the power pack. Released again he rolled over and yelled as the Chasaka

started groping for the suit fastenings.

"You take the suits from us and you'll kill us just as surely as if you'd slit our throats!"

The sheer volume made the Chasaka pause. Scott looked for Spock again and was dismayed to see that he had also been divested of his equipment.

"You hairy maniacs! What are you trying to do? If this is some form of Chasaka joke, let me say right now that I don't find it funny, not at all." He started for Spock again, and was again impeded by the aliens. He looked up at the one barring his way.

"You shilpit wee nyaff!" he growled out. "You worthless, gormless, hairy loon! Get out o' my way, ye... ye... *thing*, ye!!!"

The Chasaka growled at each other. Scott looked startled within the facial shield. The aliens had turned off the universal translator. Something soft and heavy was flipped over his head and bound around him, trapping his arms by his sides. He struggled and yelled desperately, but all that gained him was to be tripped sideways into the snow and to have his legs bound too. He wondered dizzily whether it would be easier to die of the extreme cold than to be smothered to death in a stinking Providash pelt. He was still fighting for breath when he felt himself lifted and slung up and across a Providash. Strangely, the new, head-down position eased his breathing problem and left him free to worry about Spock.

Fine protection you turned out to be! he thought bitterly. *You came along to look after him and all you did was get taken prisoner with him.*

The Providash began walking, then broke into a lumbering trot, grinding his chest against the thick hide and the ropes. He just tried to keep breathing, and hoped that Spock was breathing too. Quite how long the journey lasted he never knew. It seemed to go on forever, and he lost consciousness several times during the trip. When he was finally hauled down from the Providash, it was to be slung over the shoulder of a Chasaka and carried. Despite the muffling effect of the hide he could tell that they were no longer out in the open and he tried to remember the turns made by his captor; but the combinations of events defeated him. He was deposited almost gently on the floor and the thongs binding his arms were loosened.

The Chasaka Rancher stood over him.

"You are our guests," she intoned, waving the universal translator at him. "You are in a room deep under the mountains where none may find you. You will stay here until our requests are granted by your Controller Kirk."

She left, the inevitable stone-slab door whispering closed behind her. Panting heavily, Scott looked wildly round the room and saw that another bundle had been left behind with him. Not bothering to free his legs he pulled himself across the small distance separating him from Spock. The knots on the leather thongs defeated his gloved fingers so he pulled the gauntlets off and tried again. He was almost sobbing with anger before the ropes yielded before the onslaught of his numbed fingers and he pulled the furs from Spock. He fumbled with the fastening at the neck of Spock's suit, trying to find a pulse point. Although Spock's flesh felt cool, even to his

cold fingers, the pulse throbbed gently against his touch and he all but collapsed with relief at finding that Spock was still alive.

He attacked the ropes on his own legs with vigour and then turned on Spock's. He debated, very briefly, on moving him; weighing the aggravation of injuries already sustained against the current circumstances and decided that the Providash ride would have already done all the damage that it was possible to do. He refastened Spock's suit then wrapped him in both the pelts.

When the Chasaka who had introduced herself as Mist-Floating came back, she found Scott cradling the other alien in his arms.

"Is there anything you need?"

"Yes!" snapped Scott. "We need to get out of here!"

"That is not possible until your Controller returns for you."

"He won't be back for another three days. Do you mean to keep us here, like this, until then?"

The Chasaka peered down at him, then replied thoughtfully, as if she had only just considered the question, "Yes."

"Tell me. If you had stolen a Providash, would you keep it here?"

"Of course not!" The reply was indignant.

"Of course not!" mimicked Scott. "You'd keep it in a stall with bedding and food and water. It seems to me that you have more regard for those beasts that you eat than you do for us."

The girl reacted with what Scott hoped was astonishment. "Why do you need those things? We were told that while you wore the bright suits you would not need them."

"Those suits that you so nearly ripped from us, *and* the devices that you did steal after you attacked us. We need those devices."

"You cannot have them," was the instant reply, precisely what Scott had expected.

"Then bring us some bedding, unless you want us to freeze to death in here, and some food and water!" shouted Scott. "And don't bother to come back in here without bringing them!"

Scott hugged Spock closer, bowing his head and ignoring the girl. He knew that he was taking a terrible risk, but he could see no other way to handle the situation. He had to get Spock warmed up and quickly, and he had to force concessions from the Chasaka who had kidnapped them. The fact that the aliens didn't know the normal behaviour and bodily requirements for Humans and Vulcans was the only lever that he had to work with. That, and the inspiration that all the Chasaka in the escorting party were young. He sat, tense, until Mist-Floating retreated out of the door and then relaxed his grip a little. He shifted his position slightly, trying to tell himself that his buttocks and legs were numb because of inaction rather than cold; because if *he* were cold then Spock must be cold too, and that meant a very deadly danger to the Vulcan.

He resumed his head-bowed stance the instant he heard the door

move, and held it as the Chasaka entered and left without speaking to him. He smiled mirthlessly as he surveyed the fruits of his thundrous outburst. The padded pallet was smaller and thinner than the ones they had been using in the complex, but it would serve to protect them from contact with the icy-cold stone floor. Scott shifted Spock onto it and wrapped the other furs around him, mentally apologising for putting Spock into such close contact with the products of dead animals. He was too thankful now that the Providash were such large beasts. The new furs were much thicker, and hopefully would provide more protection for them... both.

Scott staggered across the cell to where the food and water containers had been placed. As he had feared, the food was the ubiquitous Providash stew and therefore inedible, but the melted snow in its insulated container was fresh. He had never realised that water, even though it was slightly warm, could taste so good. He covered the stew again. The smell was too good to be borne on an empty stomach. He dropped the water container onto the bed beside Spock and investigated the rock slab door until his body protested too strongly. Slightly warmer from his futile exertions he stood irresolutely by the bed then untucked Spock, lifted the furs and slid in beside the Vulcan, wrapping the covers around them both.

He woke some time later to feel Spock stir feebly. He eased Spock over and when the Vulcan finally opened his eyes it was to see Scott peering worriedly down at him.

"How do you feel?" inquired Scott.

Spock considered the question, and answered, a trifle fuzzily. "With my nerve endings... some more than others."

Scott didn't bother to smile. "Can you tell me how badly you're hurt?"

Spock was quiet for so long that Scott thought he'd passed out again. "I am not sure. I do not seem able to monitor my body in quite the way that I think I should. There do not seem to be any bones broken but I think that I am severely bruised. I don't remember how I came to be injured?"

"The Chasaka have kidnapped us," stated Scott bluntly.

"Indeed? Do you know where we are now?" Spock's eyes flicked round the bare room, taking in the blank walls and the ever-present light.

"I didnae see the outside. They wrapped us both up in furs, and I couldnae see a thing. She has said that we're in a room under the mountains."

"There is a range of mountains some distance to the south of the complex. There is a system of tunnels and mine-workings there. I cannot recall any others within a day's riding distance."

"Damn! They must be all of sixty kilometres away. Spock, they took all our gear. The power-packs, everything."

"That would explain much. How long have we been here?"

"I dinna know. They took my chrono too. She's talking about

not letting us go until the Enterprise comes back. That'll be three days; and we have no food."

Spock nodded. "Do we have any water?"

"Aye. Would ye like a drop?"

Scott had to lift Spock slightly and didn't fail to notice the deepening in the lines around his mouth. He resettled Spock and cuddled down beside him. "I'm sorry we have tae share like this," he began.

"Would you prefer to shiver?" interrupted Spock a trifle more alertly.

"No more than I absolutely have tae."

"Then the subject is closed."

Silence descended once more and Scott was frankly dozing when Spock asked, "Do you know where our gear is?"

"No. After they jumped us and stripped it off us, well, they were going tae take the suits from us too. I lost ma temper and insulted them, and they wrapped us in the furs and loaded us onto some of those prime Providash. What they did wi' the equipment I couldna see."

"They doubtless used the furs to conceal the bright colouring of our suits. Orange is not a naturally occurring colour on this planet and they wished to make us less noticeable to any casual witnesses. The furs are undoubtedly the only reason that I am still alive. If they do not have the equipment, then we have a possible channel of communication with Dr. McCoy and Mr. Sulu."

"How?"

"Food," replied Spock succinctly. "We cannot eat the Chasaka food, and if their knowledge of us is as limited as I believe, we may be able to convince them that we are in desperate need of it."

"That might just work, but it would depend on their not having the food, and on their telling Bones and Sulu that we've been kidnapped. Although once we don't return..."

"Do not underestimate the Chasaka. I am considering the possibility that the people we left the complex with were not the ones we should have accompanied. The more I reflect on this, it seems to be the logical answer."

Scott shook his head. "It never occurred tae me tae check."

Conversation lapsed again until Spock said almost diffidently, "I have been evaluating my physical condition."

That brought Scott wide awake. "And?"

"I am somewhat injured and can only move with limited success. I would not be able to travel with any rapidity should a possibility to escape present itself. If it should."

"We both go or we both stay," Scott stated.

"Such a decision is - "

"Entirely logical, considering a certain Captain's probable reaction to all this. Besides, the complex is over sixty kilometres away. I'd freeze tae death before I'd reached halfway."

"Yes, I had forgotten. No power packs."

Spock drifted off to sleep, and Scott resumed his close huddled position, now wide awake and his mind racing. *Spock had forgotten?* When the Chasaka returned, he was going to have to do some very fast talking.

The Chasaka were delighted with the success of their plan. It had been easier to do than they had thought it would be. They had delayed the Chasaka who were going to escort the two aliens on a 'fact-finding tour' (whatever that was) of a Providash ranch by saying that the aliens were not ready and had requested a delay. Then they had simply turned up at the quarters assigned to the aliens and presented themselves as the expected escort. The aliens had trustingly gone along with them. The girl who had introduced herself as Mist-Floating (and who had thought up the stealing idea in the first place) felt very guilty about having lied to the aliens, and even worse about the violence that they had occasioned when removing their devices. The young Chasaka had all heard tales of the strange and wondrous things the aliens could do with their manufactured things, but they did not know which devices did what, except for the rod which turned their language into Chasaka and Chasaka into the alien language. That, she held delicately in her massive hands, unsure still of how strong it was.

They had learned that one alien was stronger and reacted faster than the other when they had sought to remove the devices. Panicked by the unexpected resistance, one of the kidnapping group had forgotten their resolve not to injure the aliens and had leaped onto him from another Providash, landing a blow that had driven the consciousness from the alien body for hours. For a long while they had thought that they had killed him. The other, weaker, one had been held without difficulty and had taught them that despite his physical inability, his brain was exceptionally active in the realm of inventive invective.

The active and vocal one swung round on her again.

"I ken that ye want more say in yer life, and I sympathise with yer motives. But holding us prisoner is no' going tae get ye anywhere."

"It will," she assured him earnestly. "You were due to return to your companions yesterday. The Controllers and their Officers will not be able to conceal your disappearance from them. When your Controller returns he will be very annoyed with them, and with our Controller, and cause much fuss. Word of our wishes will thus be spread."

"Then what? Can ye no' see? Your world is going through an Ice Age. You need your customs and your Controllers so that you continue surviving."

"It should be the right of everyone to breed."

"Not when it would cause a breakdown in the structure of your society. Believe me, you'd no' like the anarchy that would result from such a move."

"The Controllers lie!!!" She stood up, reinforcing in Scott's mind her physical similarities to the Earth-born grizzly bear. The bright patterns of the Providash pelt clashed with her own long fur. She looked exactly like a decorated grizzly wearing an extra furry pair of trousers and a jacket. A very large and - at this moment - belligerent grizzly.

"I havenae seen the figures masel', but he did." Scott gestured to the small pile of furs which hid Spock from view. "And he said that the predictions and calculations were accurate. I believe him."

"They lied to him too!"

Long red canines gleamed at him from her jaws. Scott had to remind himself that the alien facing him was sentient. Despite all the experience of his long and somewhat varied career, it was very difficult not to back away. The furry mountain towering over him was intelligent, and thus not likely to sink those fangs into his throat if he defied her. He refused to let himself remember the less sociable habits of the Kzinti.

"Listen tae me, lassie. If you've got an argument, then it's your right tae take it up. You've no right at all tae suck us intae it. We canna do anything tae change your leaders' minds."

"I've explained that." She sounded impatient now, at least that was what the translator was implying. "We just want our wishes to be known to more people."

"The Captain canna take your case tae the Federation Council. Every world in the Federation is autonomous, and we are pledged not to interfere with the government of any peoples. We cannot interfere in the way your government runs this planet."

"He will do so. He spoke warmly of you, and of him, to the Controllers' Council. He will want to gain your return."

"You're making the self-same mistake that all youngsters do when they start dealing wi' aliens. We are not the same as you. We are not even the same as each other. Our customs and traditions are different from yours."

"Enough! I have listened as I said I would, and you have said nothing to alter my mind." She moved towards the door, taking the universal translator with her.

"Hold on now. What about the energy pack for his suit, and the food packs?"

"I think that you are over-emphasising their importance to you." She rapped on the solidly built rock door, which opened smoothly; she shut the door firmly behind her.

"TCH!!" The sound was an explosive snort of derision and disgust.

He'd tried to shift that door on his own, while Spock had been unconscious. After he had roused sufficiently to concentrate they had tried again, but the flush-fitting slab had resisted even their

combined ingenuity. The attempt had served to occupy a few of the long, cold hours after they'd been shut in the rock cell. Scott didn't have much confidence that he could shift it now, and even if he did manage to get out there was very little he could accomplish. The caverns into which their captors had brought them were intricately deep. Scott had managed to persuade the girl to tell him where they were; perhaps she had hoped to impress on him the security with which they had been concealed. Spock, faking continued unconsciousness to further worry their captors, had later confirmed her description of the tunnels.

Not that getting out of the cave system would be his first priority if he did get the door open. He was feeling the cold despite the heavy insulation of the protective suit and being mobile. The bruising sustained by Spock when the Chasaka had attacked them, and the long journey spent unconscious and strapped to the back of a Providash, had leached much-needed warmth from him. Spock desperately needed the power pack to raise the temperature in his suit, that only Scott's command of the less polite elements of his native tongue - freely modified into fluent Chasak by the universal translator - had retained for them. The initial relief he had felt when he had finally had the pelt removed and found that Spock had been brought along to the same cell had been overwhelming. It was only after that had worn off that he had recognised the extent of the problems that were facing them, and that worse was to come.

"Did you know that the Chasaka have over 80 words to describe snow?"

The question was largely rhetorical, and was uttered merely to hear if and how the figure huddled beneath all their bedclothes responded. He was pleasantly surprised when the pile answered clearly.

"Specifically, they have 19 to describe falling snow, 26 to describe driven snow, and a yet-uncalculated number to describe other climatic conditions."

"In other words, they generate an awful lot of hot air to describe snow."

"They do have a great deal of it to contend with."

"That, even I noticed. How long have ye been awake?"

"I heard the outcome of your discussion with the lady."

"Then why didn't you say something?" Scott sounded almost exasperated.

"You were doing very well on your own."

"You may not have realised this, but I was totally unsuccessful in getting yon loony child tae let us go. I couldna even get her tae feed us, let alone gie us a power pack for your suit."

"I believe it to be as we originally surmised. Our equipment is not here. They are intelligent enough to recognise the potential of the equipment and have taken precautions to prevent us regaining the use of it. They may even have left it where they removed it from us. If that is so I could not have improved upon your arguments. I remind you that young Chasaka are not impressed by control, restraint, or logical reasoning. It was your impressive range of

curse that retained for us our thermal suits and got for us these furs as bedding, without which this cell would have proved even more difficult for me to bear."

"I'm an engineer, not a diplomat."

The furs heaved and Spock rolled carefully over to face his fellow prisoner. "You've been listening to McCoy again," he said gently.

Scott joined him on the pallet which had served as their bed and tucked the furs back around Spock. He had done the same thing so often that the action had become automatic.

"It's a pity that the Captain didnae when he objected to you joining the landing party."

"The Captain was perfectly correct in his assessment of the Chasak society. It was as safe for me to join the party staying at the complex as it was for you to do so."

"Providing you kept that suit heater going."

Spock ignored the comment. There wasn't anything he could do about the pack's absence except try to lower Scott's emotional temperature. "At the time we had no information that indicated there was any discontent amongst the young people of this society. I am reasonably certain that the Council of Controllers and their officers were not aware of their growing disaffection with their customs."

"Would they have told us?"

"I think so. They set great store in personal integrity, and the first-contact staff insisted that they are not, as a race, devious. In fact, they can be devastatingly honest. They shocked the Merlin's crew several times."

"Honest! Except for the odd few who go in for assault and kidnapping."

"They are very young."

"That's nae excuse."

"What should concern us more is their loss of trust in the veracity of their leaders."

Scott sighed. "Quite frankly, right at this moment I couldnae care less. I'm more concerned about you. It's getting bad for ye, isn't it?"

Spock's eyes flickered closed. "I think so. I am no longer hungry, and I am not so immediately aware of the cold. My thought processes are affected." The last admission hurt, but had to be said for Scott's safety. He had to be warned that Spock considered himself to be no longer reliable.

Scott nodded grimly, glad that Spock had his eyes closed so that he wouldn't see the fear on his face. He'd asked Spock the same question twice before and had received the same answer; Spock, it seemed, did not remember either event. He had schooled his face into an unrevealing scowl before Spock re-opened his eyes.

"How long have we been here?" he asked.

"According to the lassie, we are due to return to the Enterprise in three days."

"Then this is the second day of our captivity."

"Aye."

"How are you coping?"

"It's no sae bad. I could wish tae be a bit warmer and less hungry, but I've been cold and hungry before. At least we can drink the water."

"It is a pity that we cannot use it to wash with. I think that I am beginning to..."

"Smell?" queried Scott.

"Stink," responded Spock gallantly.

"I've never actually smelt the inside of a Klingon boot, but this is about as close to the real thing as I'd like to get. It's annoying, isn't it?"

"Very."

"Would you like a drink?"

"Yes, please."

Scott retrieved the insulated container and poured a small beakerful for Spock, who drank, then huddled back under the furs muttering, "Thank you," as he went.

Scott tucked him in again then stayed on the pallet watching Spock and listening to his breathing. Gradually the rhythm changed as Spock went back to sleep. Scott shook his head sadly, feeling the odd mixture of anger and shame that had haunted him since their incarceration began. Anger towards the misguidedly sincere young Chasaka who had plotted and carried out this plan, and shame that he was being forced to witness the deterioration of Spock's mental and physical condition.

The vicious downward spiral had begun slowly on the long journey from the place where they were attacked to the cave, with the thermal suit just winning out against the cold. Now Spock was showing all the classic symptoms of hypothermia. He no longer felt the cold so keenly, he was less active, even discounting the bruising that Scott felt sure he had sustained, he had lost his appetite, and moreover had admitted to no longer feeling hunger. Far the worst thing was that Spock had become mentally confused. His time sense was completely gone and he was failing to remember conversations. Soon his temperature would fall below his body's safety margins, and when that happened Scott knew that only the medical facilities on the Enterprise would hold any hope for him.

They had spent the night together under the furs. Scott had finally managed to overcome his reluctance to intrude upon Spock's privacy and had cuddled the Vulcan, lending what little warmth he could, and the comfort of his presence.

His mood was still far from diplomatic when a Chasaka entered the cell some time later. For the first time it wasn't the fake rancher. Keeping the character he had established, Scott growled at him, and was slightly startled when the alien actually shuffled his feet. He had the translator held in his hands like a talisman against evil.

"Well?" grated out Scott.

"We talked over what you said to... All you said earlier. Is it really true that you're ill from being too cold?"

The question brought hope to Scott. "It's true. Both our home worlds are much hotter than Chasak. My home world has ice and snow at the poles, and it only snows in winter. His home world doesn't have ice and snow *anywhere*."

"You kept asking for some of the devices. You said that they would cause warmth to be generated inside his clothes. We don't have any of your devices here, but I think that I have thought of another solution. Will you stand against the far wall? Please?"

Scott warily backed away, ready to leap if Spock were threatened. Two more Chasaka edged into the cell, carrying a large padded bulk between them. They dumped it on the floor and backed out of the room to reappear with their long arms filled with exotically coloured furs. They dropped them on the padding and backed out again, and then repeated the process.

"Those are all the furs that we can gather without drawing attention to ourselves. Will they be sufficient to warm you?"

"They'll help, but we will need food too."

"We have given you food. You have refused it."

"That's your food. If we ate it it would poison us, as surely as our food would poison you. We carried food with us, in the packs on the Providash seats. Small square boxes."

"They are not here."

"Then you'd better bring some of them to us soon, or you'll be murderers as well as kidnappers."

Dawn-Rising-in-Storm was roaring angry.

The politely-worded note announcing the prolonged removal of two of his alien guests had, at first, amused him. He thought it was a hoax being played on him by his twin and fellow Controller, Star-Twinkling-in-Storm. They had played hoaxes on each other since they had been cubs, everything from replacing clothes with identical items made in smaller or larger sizes, to 'rustling' Providash calves. He had turned up at the entrance to Star-Twinkling's complex and jovially demanded the aliens' return. Star-Twinkling in his turn had thought Dawn-Rising's claim to be a joke, and both had become very excited until a mutual conviction had been reached that neither one was hoaxing the other, that someone had really stolen two of the four aliens residing in Dawn-Rising's complex.

A hurried and somewhat decorative conversation between the two

had resulted in the immediate mobilisation of both complexes, and riders of fast Providash being despatched to every surrounding complex. Each rider took with him or her a jointly signed letter detailing the loss and begging for help in finding the stolen ones.

Such was the standing that Dawn-Rising and Star-Twinkling were held in that every complex contacted responded to the joint plea. Singularly, the pair of Storm children were as capable as the next Controller of devious manoeuvring to increase standards for their own complexes. However, twin births were so rare on Chasak that the people so born were accorded particular respect, and by ancient custom any document freely signed by both twins was held to be totally truthful. Each complex immediately started checking on their own people and lands, and sent riders out to other complexes to pass the word on.

By the time Dawn-Rising had returned to his own complex in the fast-falling dusk, half the island had been alerted. It was then that Dawn-Rising did something that the young kidnappers did not expect of him. Without waiting to find out if his people could find the missing aliens he went to the two remaining ones and told them what had happened.

He found them in their quarters, working some of the devices that so fascinated him, and which he had been forbidden to investigate.

Sulu looked up as Dawn-Rising stood in the doorway. "Come in. . . Would you like another chess lesson?"

"Your offer is very kind but I am come here on a serious matter. Where is McCoy?"

"Trying to raise Spock and Scott on the communicators."

"I think that he will not succeed," was the heavily spoken reply.

Sulu slowly turned, looking up at Dawn-Rising. "Just why do you think that?"

"I think that they have been stolen."

"Stolen!!??"

"I have received a letter from some Chasaka who claim to have stolen them."

"Is it genuine?"

"I think that it is."

"Oh."

"Oh, what?" asked McCoy, entering the room.

"Did you raise Spock or Scott?"

"No. So much for Scott's infallible communications booster. He was so certain that it was going to work."

"That may not be the problem."

"Do tell?" McCoy perched on the edge of a slightly too large table.

"Your friends may not be able to respond to your signal."

Dawn-Rising watched the non-verbal signals passing between the two and wished again that he could read them as easily as Chasaka behaviour patterns.

"Why not?" demanded McCoy.

"They have been stolen," replied Dawn-Rising.

"The communicators?"

"No. Spock and Scott."

"What!!! How? Who by? When?" Both aliens spoke at once, jumbling the questions together.

"What and how and when I can tell you. Who by may take a little while to find out."

"Tell us all you know," invited Sulu.

Dawn-Rising considered the invitation, knowing it to be a command. The aliens were officers left by the Federation Controller Kirk to investigate the Chasaka society for the Federation, just as several Controllers were now aboard the ship called Enterprise doing much the same job for Chasak. He debated the wisdom of obeying the order, then wondered why he was bothering to do so. He knew his own limitations. He was a good Controller of this complex; perhaps one day in the time yet to come he would be given a greater area to husband. The one who had commanded him to speak - he knew that one guided the great ship between the stars and had much knowledge of technology. And he was the most junior of the four aliens! The decision to aid, and yes, obey them, he had made just as soon as he had found out that the letter was truthful. He had learned to respect these very odd four in a very short time.

Carefully, he sat on the floor, bringing his head almost level with the seated McCoy and the standing Sulu.

"How was ridiculously simple. Spock and Scott were travelling out to see a Providash ranch. You know this; I heard you arguing against Spock's going. Someone met the Rancher and her workers when they arrived here. He said that he bore greetings from the aliens and asked for a delay in departure. They agreed and waited; the young one who met then had them served a meal. After some little time another young one went to them saying that you all had been called into a meeting with the local Controllers and regrettably had to cancel the trip. The Rancher grumbled, accepted the words and left, angry at the snub dealt to her.

"Spock and Scott were seen leaving the complex in the company of Chasaka dressed as ranchers. This was especially noted because they were riding Providash, not using the sledges as they had before."

He paused and looked at Sulu for explanation of McCoy's sudden oath.

"Ignore him," advised the harassed helmsman.

"I received a message last night which said that they had found the ranch so interesting that they had accepted the Rancher's offer to stay the night. This act would have conferred great honour on the Rancher, and I accepted it as genuine. Spock will make a very good Controller in the time yet to be."

McCoy shifted and said sourly, "He's a very good Controller now, he just prefers to be a scientist. His people, his family, are Controllers on their own world. His father is often used by the Federation to speak with the representatives of other worlds."

"Such training always shows."

Yes, it does. So Spock and Scott just went along with a group of Chasaka who were posing as the Rancher and her people?"

"A plan of great ingenuity. The young ones who thought of it would have made great Controllers. Now they have invented a new crime, and we are hunting them as we would hunt down a wounded predator loose on the grazing lands. All the complexes are hunting for them. Everyone within a day's hard ride will have been notified by now and those complexes will have sent on fresh riders to the complexes further away. I asked for a particular watch to be kept on the ports so that passage could not be taken to other islands. They are trapped here now and they will be found. What they have done is a very grave insult to the Federation and to Chasak. We gave our word to you that it would be safe for you to be here with us."

"You gave your word in good faith," comforted Sulu. "We know that."

"Your Controller may not choose to be so generous, and rightly so. Your safety is my responsibility."

"Are they in danger? The reports said that your people don't resort to physical violence against one another. Would they against my friends?"

"I doubt it, McCoy; but then again nobody has ever stolen *people* before. These young are remarkably inventive."

"That," said Sulu, "is the fourth time you've said 'young' when you've referred to the stealers."

"Yes. We believe that they are young."

"Why?" asked McCoy.

"The two who met the Rancher - she described them both as young and handsome. The workers in the stables said that the two males who were preparing the mounts were young." He paused then. "The demands that they make also indicate youth."

"What demands?"

"I would speak of things not normally spoken of by any save Controllers. I mean no insult in saying this, or that which I must now say. I only ask you to listen with the openness that you have shown during your stay, and try to understand our reasons for acting as we have. We Chasaka have a reputation for truthful speaking and openness. We do not say falsehoods to others. We merely do not say

all that could be said; thus we conceal much information which would cause disharmony amongst those we are sworn to serve and protect. I mean no disrespect in saying this, for you are both finely trained and have brought great credit to yourselves and your Controller."

Sulu grimaced. "I've got this sneaky feeling that our Science Officer has been holding out on us again."

"Funny, I got the same."

"You keep secrets from each other?" asked Dawn-Rising.

"Spock and Captain Kirk often have information which they cannot share with us. We did notice some interesting discrepancies between your culture and some of your artifacts. All Spock said when we told him was 'Put it in your report'."

"Did he have access to the reports of the ship we first contacted?"

"McCoy considered, then said, "Very probably. He briefed us on this mission and that could explain why Jim insisted that he was included."

"If I speak to you of these matters?"

"We report to Kirk and we have done enough of this kind of thing to know when we should keep our mouths well and truly shut."

"Absolutely," said Sulu. "Besides, the more we know, the better chance we have of helping you find them before the Enterprise returns. I don't want to have to tell the Captain that we've lost Spock and Scott."

Dawn-Rising indicated total assent. "The demands made for their return include the co-operation of Captain Kirk. I would also prefer to have regained his friend; I know that these demands on him cannot be met. The stealers demand that he speaks their words at the meetings of the Star-travelling worlds. We already know that this cannot be done.

"My words concern the history of Chasak. Once, this world was not as it is now. It was warmer, snow did not fall continuously and only appeared at certain times in the year. The people of Chasak were numerous. Then the scientists noted that the weather was changing. The records say that there were many arguments between the scientists before agreement was reached about what was happening. The climate was to grow colder for a time. It is possible that they caused it to happen; the records do not say why. Those who study these matters still argue about it. We do know that drastic measures were introduced to ensure the survival of our people through this Ice Age."

"So this society is an artificial construct," said McCoy. "I thought so."

"The first Controllers made a society that could ensure survival. It must have been a very difficult choice for them. The level of technology at that time seems to have placed us on the very edge of space flight; we had reached our moons. The decision was either to continue outwards and attempt to reach another viable planet, or to turn inwards, and wait."

"And they chose to wait," Sulu commented.

"Indeed. Their estimations showed that if they chose the starward alternative, not only was there no guarantee that a planet could be reached, but that the society that produced the outward effort would be unable to endure the onslaught of the cold. They began the restructuring slowly and carefully, taking fourteen generations for the changes to be completed. The technology in general use was changed too, the knowledge of how things were before degenerating to the stuff of children's tales. The knowledge was not lost, though. It has been stored so that when the cold leaves Chasak we can change back to the ways of before."

"You do use some of the technology now. The perpetual lights and the metal foundries. Scott said that they indicated a far higher level of development than could be explained by other areas of your society," said Sulu.

"The medical sciences are also far in advance of what could normally be expected," said McCoy.

"And you contacted us. You had the scientists on the Merlin twittering on for hours about how you punched the comms link through an electrical storm and the peculiar interference of your planet's magnetic field."

"That was a mistake. The scientists knew that there was something up there. They got excited and forgot their orders. We are not yet ready to withstand the stresses of contact with alien cultures."

"I have to agree with that," muttered McCoy. "And the sooner we leave, the less damage we'll do."

"Some has already been done," answered Dawn-Rising.

"The stealers?" queried Sulu.

"They are the first. Unless we break contact, there will be other incidents." Dawn-Rising sounded very unhappy.

"What else do they want?" asked McCoy.

"They want the right to breed," was the flat reply.

Sulu's mouth dropped open. It took him three goes before he managed a feeble, "Pardon?"

"They want the right to breed," repeated the Chasaka patiently.

"That's what I thought you said."

"Maybe you'd better explain to us," offered McCoy.

"The energies of the society have been concentrated on the survival of the people. We have no spare surplus of resources to spend on luxuries. The pattern has been set. As Controller it is my duty to preserve that which is, so that the plans made long ago for the time that is to be may come to success. It is my duty to husband this complex. I know how many people of what ages should be here to keep it healthy. Each year, I and the Healers here meet and decide how many young should be born in the next year. I take this figure to the Controllers' Meeting as all the Controllers do. We announce

it there, as does every complex. We all do this. It is a matter of trust."

"We understand," said Sulu softly.

"The Healers choose which people should be allowed to bear children. From each person they have taken something, I do not know what, and they look at this very closely. From this something they can tell which people should not have children. They say that some people have things wrong with the ways that their body has been made and that the children born to them could be harmed by these things. Those so excluded are never told; they believe that their names are entered in the shask."

"That didn't translate," interrupted Sulu.

"The people who are given the privilege of bearing young are aka'a'shask."

"That didn't translate either," said McCoy. "Are you trying to say that those people who can have children are picked at random?"

"Yes, that is so. Let us say that I am allowed ten young in this complex. Ten people will be chosen, and they may choose who will be privileged to be co-parent with them. The only restriction is that they cannot choose another who has been given the privilege at this time. They can make the selection from this or any other complex."

"What happens if they pick a partner who has been rejected as unsuitable by the Healers?"

"Nothing. No child is conceived."

McCoy nodded dourly while Sulu struggled to conceal his feelings. Dawn-Rising noticed and shifted uncomfortably.

"These are not your ways."

"No, they are not," agreed McCoy. "We believe that children are a gift that two people may give to each other when they wish to give it. But these ways are your ways, and we respect them."

"That is what the people from the Merlin told us. I fear that their words are known to others than Controllers and Officers. To listen to them would have been a great temptation."

McCoy thought of a pair of dark brown eyes, alive with interest, studying a problem. "Curiosity is another thing we have in common."

Sulu refused to be diverted. "So the youngsters who have stolen Spock and Scott want to be able to have children whenever they want?"

"And they want the agreement announced to all the people."

"Once the word of that got out you'd have a population explosion," exclaimed McCoy.

"A most descriptive name, and accurate too. And it is the reason why we dare not accede to these demands. If we increase the population we will have to increase our food supply, or face famine. Every complex would have the same problem because every complex would need to feed more people. We could try to take someone else's food

supply, but that would not be accepted without complaint." That was the only way Dawn-Rising could describe war. "Or we could encroach on the reserves of lands set aside for the animals and plants of Chasak. Those lands are untouched because it is from those carefully chosen areas that the plants and animals of the Time Yet to Be, the Time without snow, will come. If we destroy them now, when we are so close to the end of the ice and snow, what will the children of the warm times think of us? How can we let the greed of a few young people destroy all that has been planned?"

"Do you know how close the end of the Ice Age is?" asked Sulu.

"I am told that if I am chosen to have young, it will be that the young of its children's children will walk on ground which is not cold, and that they will see water that is not snow falling from the sky."

"Close enough. Doctor, this is Prime Directive time, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

"What is *Prime Directive* ?"

"It's a rule made by our peoples. It says that we mustn't interfere with the development of cultures by contaminating them with our customs."

"Simply put, it means that if our presence here could result in the breakdown of your society, either by the introduction of new ideas - stealing people for example- or by changing customs so that the future ecology of this planet is jeopardised - in this case, by having babies - then we have to leave. In fact, we should never have come. Which explains why this landing party is only four strong and consists of four of the most senior officers on the ship." McCoy slammed his fist against the table. "Why the hell didn't they warn us?"

"Independent observations are more valid, and we had to find out more about the people who invented that comms equipment," said Sulu.

They were interrupted by the entrance of another Chasaka, equally as massive as Dawn-Rising. The Chasaka paused at the entrance looking for Dawn-Rising, then hurried across the room, ice and snow melting from heavy riding furs.

"I must speak with you, Dawn-Rising. Now."

"Sulu, McCoy. This is Cloud-Filled-with-Snow. She is one of my officers. Say on, Cloud."

"This is important."

"Does this concern the stolen ones?"

The look of horror on Cloud's face could have been comical in other circumstances. "Yes, Dawn-Rising."

"It's all right. I told them - they do have the right to know, and they may be able to help us."

"Yes. Of course."

"Well?"

"We searched, but as usual snow had fallen and the wind had blown it. There were no tracks to find. Too much time had passed, a day and a night left us with no chance of finding some sign of the stolen ones, and we can be certain that the stealers were taking the trouble to hide their trail. We kept on looking, though, and talked to all the travellers that we encountered, hoping that they had seen something. One related a strange incident. At the junction of the trails between the south parts and the mountains, one of his Providash went lame. He noticed, and checked the injury; then he and his crew went back to dig up whatever had crippled the Providash. They found these. When the traveller showed me, I brought them directly here." Cloud upended a bag and spilled the contents on the table.

"Damn," said McCoy quietly and began to sort through the objects. He was joined by Sulu, who immediately picked up a fist-sized block.

"Now we really are in it," he stated. "This is the pack from Spock's suit."

"Daft question. Are you *sure*?"

"Yeah. How many of these do you think there are on this planet? Besides, I checked the ratings of the power packs before they left yesterday - not that they wouldn't have, but I was being extra careful."

"It was fully charged?" asked McCoy.

"Yes."

"Can you do a comparison and find out how much power has been used? And do Scotty's pack too."

"No problem." Sulu picked up both, and the tricorders, and went into a huddle over them.

"How far away is this junction where this lot was found, Cloud?"

At Dawn-Rising's nod she answered, "About a third of a day's gentle ride. It is the junction of many trails, and to discard anything there is extremely foolish, which is why the trader dug for whatever had caused the injury. I sent my second, Furious-Wind, there to see if there were any traces, but I doubt if she will find any. They could have gone in many directions"

"Are there many shelters within two-thirds of a day's ride of that junction where they could hide?"

"Perhaps eighty. There are far more on the flanks of the mountains; that is the border of a hunting area, and trappers and hunters use them for storage and shelter."

"Quite an area to search."

Dawn-Rising indicated puzzlement. "Why so near? They could have kept travelling, and be days away."

"You remember Spock's description of his world? His people have little defence against the type of cold found on your world. The devices that Sulu is checking are the sources of heating that kept the temperature inside his suit, and Scott's suit, at safe levels."

He turned slightly, showing a similar box strapped to the small of his back. "Without the power source, the temperature of the suits will fall. Scott will be able to keep going for longer than Spock - our world is colder than his. Dawn-Rising, unless those stealers of people got him to a sheltered place and gave him some form of heating during the night, Spock will not have survived."

Dawn-Rising and Cloud were suitably horrified. "He is that frail?"

"Not frail. Different. Your world is alien to us. We all find that it is too cold, just as you would find our worlds to be very, very hot."

Cloud placed a comforting arm around Dawn-Rising's shoulders. "We will search, and we will find them."

Dawn-Rising looked at McCoy, and then at Sulu, who had joined them.

"The power curve checks out against the riding distance." His voice was carefully flat.

"Spill it, Sulu," said McCoy.

"The packs are damaged. Whoever removed them didn't know the correct procedure. They've been yanked free. When we find them, we'll have to have replacement suits for them to change into."

"You are confident that we will." Dawn-Rising straightened. "I knew that you were different. You are the wrong shape and size. You are not decently covered in fur. You move strangely, and your body says things that I do not know how to interpret."

McCoy smiled up at him. "But you've only just realised how different."

"Yes!!!"

"It is an interesting feeling, isn't it?"

"You have felt this too?"

"All the time."

"We regret that this has happened," said Dawn-Rising softly. "The search of that area will be started immediately."

McCoy wandered away and looked at the fire, leaving Sulu to do the talking. "We'd rather that it had never happened; but as it is, the only sensible thing to do is to accept it and try to minimise the damage to both sides."

"If you think of anything that can be done to save your friends -"

"We'll tell you," confirmed Sulu.

Dawn-Rising and Cloud left at this obvious dismissal. At the door they turned, to see the two aliens outlined by the fire, the smaller trying to comfort the larger. The Chasaka left quietly. There wasn't anything more to be said.

McCoy stared at the flames for a very long time, then snapped his fingers and said, "Got it!" with an air of satisfaction.

"Is it contagious?" asked Sulu.

"Help me check the food supplies that they took with them."

A short while later Sulu looked inquiringly at McCoy. "It's all here. The only thing that's missing is the universal translator."

"Good."

"Good? Bones, they can't eat Chasaka food!"

"My point exactly. Look, the Chasaka reverse life - "

"They are meat eaters," cautioned Sulu.

"Only because they have to be. There isn't enough vegetation to support a community like this. I'm sure that the original scientists manufactured the Providash to supply all the dietary needs of the Chasaka. They use every last bit of the animal in just the same way as the American Indian used to use the buffalo."

"So?"

"So if Spock and Scott are still alive, and we have to assume that they are, they'll be getting hungry by now."

Sulu shook his head.

"Food, Sulu. They'll know that the kidnappers don't have any food to give them, and they'll also know that all the food they can eat was either in their packs - which the kidnappers threw away with the power packs - "

"Or is here with us. Do you think they can pull it off?"

"Scott can be a very convincing liar when he has to be, and don't underestimate Spock. He can play a mean hand of poker. They'll find a way of convincing their kidnappers. Can you set up some dedicated tracking devices to conceal inside the food packs while I go and find Dawn-Rising and tell him what we have planned."

Dawn-Rising was astonished at the simplicity of the plan McCoy quickly outlined for him. "You expect this to work?"

"Knowing Spock and Scott as well as I do, yes. Can you arrange for someone to watch the entrance for anyone sneaking into our quarters?"

"Of course, but why not detain them? Why risk losing them in the snowfields?"

"What happens if our clever and inventive young criminal decides not to tell us where Spock and Scott are? Your Healers don't have the drugs to loosen his tongue and mine won't work on a Chasaka. Detaining whoever comes would deny food to Spock and Scott; the people-stealers would not try again."

"That is so. My best trackers will be assigned to this. We will get them back."

"When you go to release them, you'll have to take us with you."

McCoy's quiet order sparked anger in Dawn-Rising. "You do not trust me to release them?" he demanded.

"Of course I do. It's simply a matter of helping each other. Right now, Sulu is concealing devices within the food that we are hoping to get stolen. Once Spock or Scott find one of these devices they will be able to signal to us."

"I thought that your comms devices would not work on our world."

"They do, but not very well. These devices are very small and have only one function. Start them working and they emit a strong signal that will last for about an hour and be visible to our tricorders at about five kilometres." McCoy heaved a sigh of relief as the translator dealt with the term.

"Are you sure that they will do this?"

"Positive. Those youngsters have got a translator and Scott can charm the birds from the trees when he wants to."

"I should have known that you had a reason for your demand. I forgot that even though you are strange, your reasons are often the same as ours. This shall be arranged. And when we are all safely back here, you can explain to me what a 'bird' is."

McCoy laughed. "There's an old saying amongst my people. No matter how strange the other fellow, you'll always be more surprised at yourself than at him."

"This is so. I keep forgetting that you are not a Chasaka," admitted Dawn-Rising.

McCoy's smile grew wider. "That, sir, is the greatest compliment that you could possibly have paid us, and yourself."

Sulu shivered despite the suit heater and the face mask. He wasn't cold - he was lovely and warm - it just *looked* so cold. He had argued, successfully, against McCoy's being included in the lead party. The Doctor was not mentally configured for hide and seek on snowy nights. Which was why he and Dawn-Rising were now creeping slowly towards a meeting with the scout who had tracked the young Chasaka who had stolen the food packs. Cloud had identified him as Clear-Star-filled-Night, a youngster in training for a Controller position. McCoy had gleefully reported that the lad had sorted through the packs carefully and had taken an equal number of those marked for Human and Vulcan consumption. By inference, both men were still alive.

Sulu froze into a patch of shadow under a Chasak tree-equivalent, the fur robe that he now wore over his thermal suit disguising his presence. He'd seen something move up ahead. Sure enough, a Chasaka unblended itself from the side of a snowdrift and called a greeting. He let Dawn-Rising answer, and the subsequent exchange was too soft for him to follow. He stayed still until Dawn-Rising called, "Sulu! Sulu! Where are you?"

"Here." He edged forwards and was rewarded by an appreciative if somewhat startled grunt from the scout.

"You use cover well for a cub."

"Every little helps, and these snow-coloured furs are more than a little. You were looking for something too big." He didn't bother to correct the 'cub' mistake. Comments about his lack of height only bothered him when they were made maliciously.

"When you come to an age when you have to choose your career, why don't you try for a scouting post?"

"I've already decided on my career, but thank you for the offer."

Dawn-Rising chuckled. "They are in the caves beneath the mountain. There are many tunnels and caverns there and they have watchers posted at the entrance."

"Then we wait." He shifted the robe and pulled out the tricorder. "Once they find the device and start it going it will register on this. Then your people and the people from your brother's complex can detain the youngsters at the entrance so that they can't warn the others and we can follow the signal to the right cavern."

The scout looked at the softly bleeping machine. "What is that?"

"Part of my career choice," answered Sulu cheerfully. "Is there anywhere we can wait that's out of the wind? If it gets any stronger, I'll be blown away."

Scott wasted no time in settling Spock in a nest made of the new furs, and burrowing his way in to join the sleeping Vulcan. He drifted off into an uneasy, restless sleep which was broken by nightmares in which he was trying to explain to Jim Kirk why he'd let Spock go for a ride without his suit heater. Each time he woke up sweating and terrified, to find that he was bear-hugging Spock, as if he was afraid that he'd be stolen again while he slept. Fully awake at last, he relaxed his hold slightly, cuddling Spock gently. Disgusted with himself, the kidnappers and the whole mess, he began cursing - a rich selection of curses, oaths and imprecations culled from his career in both merchant and Starfleet ships. As a performance of sheer invective it was unsurpassed in its vigour and range. Scott continued in a persistent monotone until interrupted by a gentle voice which remarked, "You are beginning to repeat yourself. You said that last description before."

"Spock! Are you awake?"

"I have yet to develop the habit of talking in my sleep."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't. I was already awake when you hugged me."

Scott started to squirm away and was stopped by Spock's upper arm falling down across his back.

"If you move away you will let in the cold."

"I thought you'd prefer if I left some space between us."

"I value my privacy, Scott, but not to the point of suicide. I feel considerably warmer. How did you accomplish it?"

"Och, weel. I must have made a good impression. They gave us a huge pile of furs."

"Did you ask for food?"

"Aye. They did leave the packs where they attacked us. I dinna know if they'll try for the stocks that are at the complex. But they did ask me how to identify the food packs."

"Then we must assume that they will try to steal food for us. If they do not - "

"They will," said Scott, with a confidence that he did not feel."

"Perhaps," conceded Spock.

Scott said quickly, "When we finally get back to the Enterprise I'm going tae stand in ma shower and not come out for a few days."

"Spock, trying not to spoil Scott's mood, replied with, "While I normally prefer sonic showers, I do agree that to be able to wash myself clean, and dress in unsoiled clothing, does have a certain attraction to me. If we remain here much longer McCoy will not know whether to treat us for exposure or ingrained dirt."

Scott chuckled. "The treatment for both is the same. Rigorous application of copious amounts of hot water. Och, I wish there was a bathtub on the Enterprise!"

"There is." Spock sounded surprised.

"What? Where?"

"In sickbay. The saline baths."

"I hadna thought of them. Tae think of the times that I've wished for a hot soak and they were there waiting for me!"

"I'm sure that Dr. McCoy could be persuaded to allow you to use one, if you could find some way of ensuring your privacy. The cubicles do not have doors."

"Aye, that would be a problem. Sickbay is always stuffed wi' staff, and the nurses all seem tae be so young."

Spock's still fuzzy thought processes found the links that would enable him to broach what he considered to be a delicate subject, yet one that it was necessary to speak of. "You could always try bribery," he offered.

"Using what? The only thing that he'd want is a mint julep, and how the hell would I get any mint?"

"There are a selection of varieties currently under cultivation in the Botany Laboratories. And the required liquid could be manufactured on your still."

Scott gulped. "I didna think that ye knew about that."

"I have been aware of its operation for some time, but while its effects were not noticeable I felt that I did not need to interfere. It was not until several persons reported for duty whilst slightly inebriated that I realised that there had to be more than one still in operation on the Enterprise. Please understand that I do not disapprove of the use of alcoholic beverages as a stimulant or relaxant. However, I cannot condone the lack of discipline that results in the presence of personnel who are in a less than fit condition to perform their duties."

"I should say not."

"I began attempting to trace the source of the alcohol. Discreetly, I assure you. Mr. Baillie was quite certain that very few persons could get large amounts of restricted items aboard, past his staff. He mentioned you as one of the most proficient. He does not know of your still and I have not informed him of it. However, I calculated that for the junior staff to have a supply sufficient to cause the scale of drunkenness involved so long after the last planetfall could only have resulted from their either smuggling aboard a totally inordinate amount of liquid - "

"Or they were running a still," completed Scott.

"I decided that that was the more logical explanation, and began to try to determine its location. The Engineering decks seemed the most likely area to begin my search. I had just completed my investigations when we arrived at Chasak."

"How did ye find my still?"

"The visible spectrum seen by the Vulcan eye is slightly different from the one seen by the Human eye. I see the panel covering access to your still as several shades darker than the surrounding walls."

"And how did ye get past ma security?"

It did require some thought on my part. An ingenious lock - my compliments. That was when I realised that such a permanent, and obviously well-run installation, could only be operated with your knowledge and consent, and left it alone."

"Ma still produces quality, not quantity. I hae served it at some of the official dinners and been complimented."

"Thus leading Mr. Baillie to believe you to be an adept smuggler."

"When I hae tae be," agreed Scott. "We hae tae get the raw materials aboard. Some of that can be bulky."

"Unfortunately, some of the other stills seem to be striving for quantity."

"Stills? Ye mean there's more than one other one going? You know where they are?"

"Affirmative. One is located in an access way on the hangar deck. A pair of pressure doors have been fitted at each end and the still is hung along the shaft. That team includes the maintenance engineer in charge of the systems there. The second is concealed in the bulkhead between two shared cabins. Again the maintenance

engineer is part of the team. The third is in the storage area in the lower hull and is run by the Stores and Supplies section. They seem to limit production to provide only for 'special occasions', and have not changed the specification of the Enterprise to do it. I request your assistance in stopping production."

"Ye hae it."

"If I do not survive this situation, and it is possible that I may not, I want to ensure that the persons responsible are removed from their positions on the Enterprise. It is not only that what they are doing is contrary to standing orders. Two of the three still involve maintenance staff tampering with the fabric and systems of the Enterprise. That, I cannot allow to continue."

"The two with the maintenance staff have definitely got to go. What about the Stores and Supplies setup? You said that they were limiting production."

"Indeed. My suggestion involves a... a partnership; between us."

"You mean that we take them over?"

"Yes. Your still is extremely well designed and well maintained, but accidents can happen. If your produce was to be below the standard for safe Human consumption, it could prove to be fatal. I could perform the necessary quality checks for you."

Scott's smile grew broader. "Aye, ye could."

"I would be prepared to do so for the Stores and Supplies still provided that they continued their current moderate level of production and avoided any incidents of drunkenness."

"The same conditions apply to ma 'setup."

"Of course."

"Agreed. An unofficial monopoly in return for quality checking."

"I am at a loss as to how to approach the Stores and Supplies group," confessed Spock.

"You leave them tae me, laddie. Faced with disciplinary action? Of course they'll agree! Besides, they'll benefit from the setup."

"I do not propose to initiate disciplinary action. It would mean undue publicity for the Enterprise."

"Well, you know that, and I know that, but *they* willna'."

"That is blackmail," said Spock.

Scott refrained from mentioning Spock's advice to try bribery on McCoy and said, "Merely arranging the factors of the situation to produce the optimum solution."

Spock was tempted to reply in kind but merely replied, "It's still blackmail."

Scott groaned at the pun. "What do ye want done wi' the other stills?"

"As one of the requirements of the situation is to avoid publicity, I thought that the overt removal of all installed equipment, coupled with the obliteration of all modifications, might be most suitable."

"So they get a nice little shock the next time they go tae fetch a bottle. And there it is - gone!"

"I also wish to remove all the personnel responsible to ground establishments."

"For the engineers, I agree, but for the others, that's a wee bit hard, just for running a still. After all, it's what I'm doing."

"Consider this situation. There has been an accident in the hangar deck. You must gain entry through the service ways. The emergency escalates and evacuation is imperative. You direct your staff to leave by the accessways; and they find their escape route blocked by a non-standard airlock which does not respond to the emergency over-ride."

Scott shuddered. "It could happen. They all have to go."

"You have utilised what is effectively an area of free space, as have the Stores and Supplies section. The other groups have taken space from the backup systems."

"I run my still with all my section chiefs. We can arrange for the removals."

"Thank you. The situation on board must be normalized as soon as possible. I have entered the information that you will need in my personal log, keyed for your voice. Please avail yourself of it." Spock paused, shy of speaking in such a familiar way despite having known Scott for so long. "Mr. Scott - even if I do survive, it is entirely possible that I will not recall this conversation. The cold and my injuries are sufficient to... If I should forget, will you remind me of this agreement?"

"I will. Believe me, I will! I want those hot baths, and the only way tae bribe McCoy is with the mint ye've got in Botany. Congratulations, Mr. Spock. Ye hae just become the co-chairman of the Free Enterprise Evening Dew Distillery," announced Scott, grandly.

"Thank you, Mr. Scott," replied Spock. "I assure you that I will not drink the profits."

"Tell me, laddie - do ye ever drink alcohol?"

"Only very occasionally, when the Captain insists. Usually it is Saurian brandy."

"Do ye like the taste of it?"

"I find it most palatable; the after effects, I would prefer to do without."

"Hangover?"

"It lasts for days." Spock sounded almost sheepish.

"McCoy could help ye wi' that."

"Contra-indicated. McCoy's reaction if I asked for a soberizer is one which I do not wish to experience."

"His tongue is sharp at times, but he doesna really mean anything by it."

"I am aware of that." Spock's voice trailed away and he relaxed back into the furs, and Scott's grasp, fast asleep.

Scott shifted the Vulcan's arm to a more comfortable position in front of him and settled down to some serious thinking. Spock had revealed facets of his personality that he'd only guessed at before. Part would doubtless be due to the effect of the cold and the injuries, but Scott knew that their conversation had happened because Spock had decided to trust him. Despite the cold, his hunger and his worries, Scott hadn't felt this good in years.

He was startled from a light doze by the Chasaka youth entering.

"What's wrang wi' you people? Haven't ye ever been taught any manners?"

The Chasaka didn't reply. He just dumped a pile of boxes onto the furs and left.

Scott peered at the boxes and whooped. "Food! Hey, Spock! Meal call!"

Spock gazed at the boxes owlshly and said with complete candour, "I'm very hungry."

There was a tone of innocence in his voice that made Scott look twice at him. Spock's returning gaze confirmed to Scott that the Vulcan was not operating at his normal level of mental efficiency.

"Would you like something now?" he invited, and Spock nodded. Scott fielded some containers while Spock inched his way upright, carefully maintaining his covering of furs. A brief search of the food packages gave Scott five of the signalling devices. He operated one, and put the others in his pocket. Spock paid no attention to Scott's action; his eyes stayed fixed on the food parcels.

"I am very hungry," he repeated wistfully.

"Aye, I know. Here, try this one." Scott pulled the self-heating tab and handed the container to Spock, who began to shovel food industriously as soon as the lid popped open. Scott selected one for himself, pulled the tab and waited almost impatiently for the lid to be popped back by the self-heating elements in the pack. The food had never tasted very good before, but to Scott it was delicious. As soon as he had finished, he opened another pack for Spock and for himself.

Thoughtfully, he dug out the tracer devices again. Sure enough, a design had been etched onto the side of each. The one he had activated had the science emblem on it, so he activated one with the engineering spiral on it and went back to eating.

He edged under the covers and tucked them up around Spock's

back, leaving his arm around Spock's shoulders. The Vulcan looked at him, head tilted slightly to one side. "I'm still hungry."

"So am I, but we mustnae eat too much. It'll give us belly ache."

"Oh. I must have forgotten that. Have I forgotten much?"

"Quite a bit, but you'll remember again once McCoy gets to work on you."

"I remember him. He always says, 'This won't hurt' and it always does."

Scott was still laughing when Sulu opened the door. He was startled to find the engineering officer of the Enterprise with his arm around the science officer.

"This is either the shortest Chasaka we have yet seen or we have been rescued," said Spock with total disinterest.

Sulu slid back the huge fur hood and Scott said, "We've been rescued. Hello, Sulu."

"Hi, Scotty. Are you two all right?" he asked suspiciously, eyeing Spock's slightly vacant expression.

"The short answer is no, and if it's safe, the sooner McCoy looks at Spock the better I'll like it."

"It's safe. There are Chasaka from four complexes surrounding his place and Dawn-Rising's people have the kidnappers hemmed in further inside the caves. McCoy's already on his way."

"Good. Thanks for coming."

"You're welcome."

Conversation lagged until McCoy arrived, then Spock suddenly dived back under the covers and Scott hooted with laughter at the reaction. It took all three to uncover Spock and peel him out of his useless suit. McCoy muttered furiously when the bruises on Spock's body were revealed, and scanned the affected areas trying to determine if there had been any serious internal injuries. Spock only wanted to keep warm, and kept trying to return to his nest under the furs. Trying to hold the silently wriggling Vulcan still without hurting him gave Scott and Sulu the giggles, and it was McCoy who finally had to coax Spock into the new thermal suit.

Scott mopped his streaming eyes and said shakily, "How is he, Bones?"

The glare he received started him off again. "How is he? That Vulcan is suffering from exposure, hypothermia and partial amnesia. All in all, you did a good job of looking after him."

Scott sobered. "Put that way it doesna sound like it."

"If you hadn't done a good job, he'd be dead. As it is, the effects of the cold have made him a little... childlike. He's gone to operating on instinct, and I doubt that our logical Mr. Spock is going to be back with us until we get back to the Enterprise."

"What about those bruises?" asked Sulu.

"Just that - bruises. I'd prescribe bed rest as the best treatment." He stopped looking at the heap. "This may be the one time that what I want him to do coincides exactly with what he wants to do."

Scott grinned, remembering Spock's unguarded evaluation of the Southern gentleman. "Make the most of it," he advised. "He's bound to argue with you directly he gets back to normal."

McCoy looked at both of them, then said softly, "The sooner the better." Then he continued briskly, "The sledge is outside; we can leave him covered up like that inside it. It will make him feel safer." He sighed, partly with relief, partly with regret, then grinned evilly. "Pluck up your courage and strip, Scotty. The replacement suit's all ready for you, and you're going to need it outside. The temperature is a wonderfully moderate 18 below with a gentle 25 mile an hour wind blowing the snow horizontally."

Scott shivered, then started to undo his suit.

Dawn-Rising, standing at the door, peeped in and was rewarded with the sight of an almost naked Scott frantically redressing. As he later explained to the Healers of his complex, the Humans had almost no fur anywhere.

The Healers quite properly refused to believe him.

Several days later, Scott strolled into sickbay to check on Spock. His recovery had not been as rapid as McCoy initially thought it would be, and Spock, still reacting openly, was confined to sickbay. Scott had taken the opportunity of McCoy's preoccupation to indulge in many hot baths in the saline tub, and was trying to decide whether he could rig a door on one of the cubicles without McCoy's noticing it. It cramped the purpose of a relaxing soak if a man was constantly on edge, fearful of being checked on by one of the wee lassies on the sickbay staff, though to be truthful it had been some of the male nurses who had stood around the bath and formally launched the inflated model of the Enterprise in his bathwater.

As he approached Spock's room the sounds of argument raged though the open door and Kirk left, laughing in uproarious happiness.

"Scotty." He glanced back over his shoulder. "As you can hear, Spock's memory has finally returned, his body has rebalanced its chemical levels and his logic is back to normal. He's just insulted Bones." He paused as McCoy's voice peaked. "Now I know he's okay - Bones' decibel level is also back to normal."

"That's grand. I wondered... the report on the Chasaka? Will it mean isolation for them?"

"Yes. The reports that you and Sulu filed, together with Spock's uncompleted one, made it perfectly clear that the Chasaka society could be permanently damaged if any outside influences intruded there. The exclusion zone has already been established, and the patrol ships are in place. In addition, we have the complete co-operation of the Chasaka Controllers, who most definitely do not want all their ancestors' hard work wasted. They've already said

that when they finally come out they'll be interested in joining the Federation, if we're still around."

"When they do, someone's going to get a big surprise - about 2.5 metres worth of solid muscles."

"And a lot of brain, too. It's a pity we couldn't study their technology for longer. McCoy says that the Providash is an artificial animal - can you imagine how advanced their biological sciences must have been?"

"Frankly, no. I was more interested in how they manufactured those perpetual lights, and I think I've got a lead on how, though I'd like to talk it over with Spock first."

"Be my guest," invited McCoy. "Our hot-blooded iceberg is ready to have visitors. He says that he's perfectly recovered."

"Is he?" asked Kirk.

"Just about. I'm keeping him in for observation, really. Seeing him like that on the planet really shook me. It was as if he were four years old." McCoy shook his head and shrugged. "Don't you dare tell him, but I was really relieved when he started insulting me this morning. By the way, Scotty - what's this sudden attraction for saline baths?"

"Och, I'll explain later."

"That, I'm going to enjoy hearing. Come on, Jim. I could do with a coffee."

McCoy and Kirk left Scott standing dithering outside the door. Squaring his shoulders, he walked in to find Spock sitting up in bed, looking distinctly bored. He smiled at the Vulcan and greeted him affectionately, to Spock's barely concealed surprise.

He'd had his section chiefs check on the location of the stills that Spock had pinpointed for him, and they had developed a plan for the dismantling of them and the takeover of the Stores and Supplies still. But before the plan could be put into operation, he had to remind Spock of their conversation. He was convinced that Spock had indeed forgotten most of what had happened on the planet, and knew that the next few minutes would be among the most embarrassing that the Co-chairman of the Free Enterprise Evening Dew Distillery would ever spend.

After all, how do you explain to a reticent, very private Vulcan that you've come to remind him about a discussion that you had with him while you were cuddling him in bed?

